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(April 2021)

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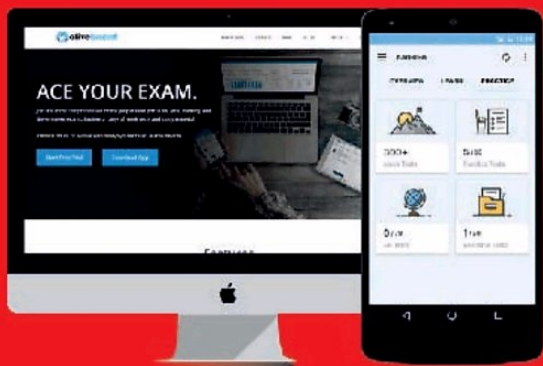
State Assembly Elections



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PREFACE

The Current Affairs April-2021 eBook covers the current events that happened in the month of March. Current Affairs is a crucial component of any competitive exams including IAS/PCS, SSC, Banking and MBA.

Current Affairs play the bigger role in many competitive and government exams. It holds the power of making or breaking your chance of success. Therefore, the candidates should cover the Current Affairs thoroughly and smartly.

However, there are huge numbers of student who are often confused about how to prepare the current affairs section of the different competitive exams. To clear such doubts and confusion, Jagranjosh.com has come up with eBook concept.

We at jagranjosh.com work tirelessly to create this magazine and bring it to you with a great sense of gratitude every month. We always strive for excellence and therefore, our research team continuously endeavours to give you the best material.

The Current Affairs April-2021 eBook is divided into different section keeping in mind the need of various exams. The sections covered are International, National, Economy, Ecology and Environment, Science & Technology, Corporate, Sports, States News Makers and few others.

Every news item in each section is chosen on the basis of its importance in competitive exams. We also kept a close eye on some of the recent analytical stories which may have direct impact on your understanding of the issue.

Presentation of the given current affairs has been planned meticulously. It has been planned in such a way that it remains in the minds of readers for a longer duration. Wherever necessary each news item is presented along with a background and analysis so as to help candidates contemplate all the important current events at the time of exam in an effective way.

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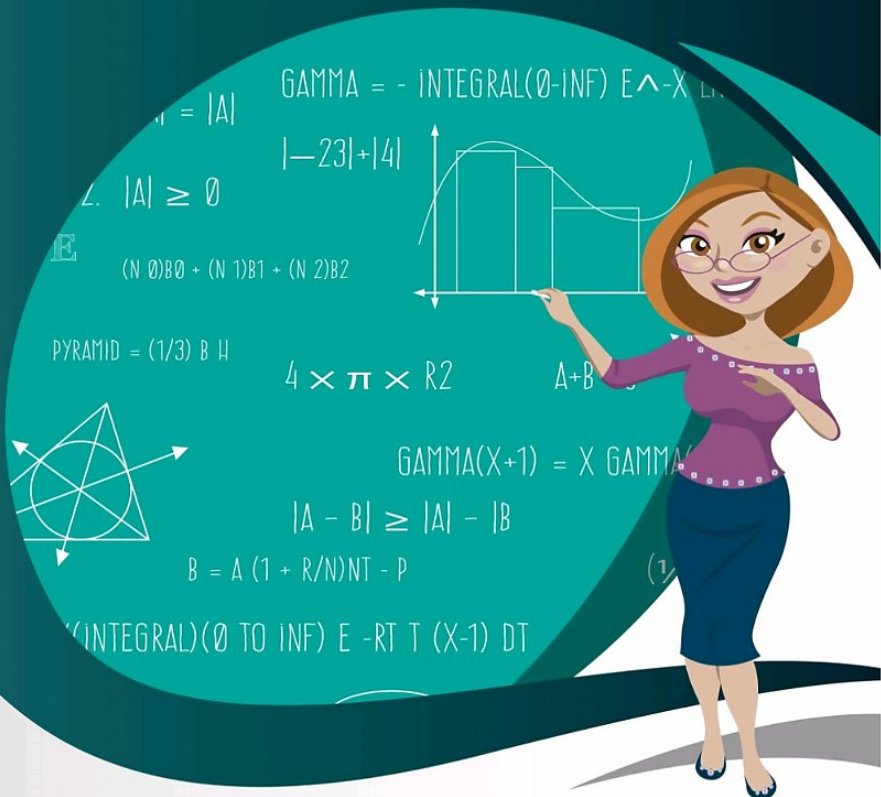
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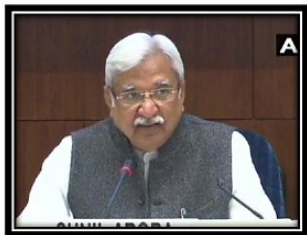
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National

Assembly Election Schedule: West Bengal to go to polls in 8 phases, final result on May 2nd, Check full schedule

The Election Commission of India announced the Assembly Election Schedule for four states and one UT- Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Puducherry on February 26, 2021.

The Assembly Election results of all five states/ UT will be declared on May 2nd. While Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry will see single-phase elections, Assam will go to polls in three phase and West Bengal will have 8 phases.



Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora while addressing the media said, "Amid the challenges of COVID-19, we shall find immense comfort in the stories of hope and positive stories that are emerging in the post COVID world. He also paid collective tribute to all the COVID warriors, doctors, paramedics, nurses, researchers, scientists and all the officials on election duty who are located on the frontlines.

The CEC further announced the theme of the **National Voter's Day 2021**: "Making our voters safe, informed and vigilant."

Further, CEC Sunil Arora said that in the thick of the pandemic, ECI started test trials with elections to 18 seats to Rajya Sabha. "After that, came the challenge of the Bihar elections, it was indeed a watershed moment for ECI. It proved to be a litmus test," he added.

Term of State Assemblies

Assam - 31st May (126 Assembly Seats)

Tamil Nadu- 24th May (234 Assembly Seats)

West Bengal- 30th May (294 Assembly Seats)

Kerala- June 1st (140 Assembly Seats)

Puducherry- June 3rd (30 Assembly Seats)

Assembly Election Schedule 2021

Assam Election Schedule - 3 Phase Election

P hases	Issue of Notifications	Last Date of Notifications	Scrutiny of Nominations	Last Date for withdrawal of Nominations	Date of Polls	Counting of Votes/ Result Day
P hase 1 (47 ACs)	2nd March	9th March	10th March	12th March	27th March	2nd May
P hase 2 (39 ACs)	5th March	12th March	15th March	17th March	1st April	2nd May
P hase 3 (40 ACs)	12th March	19th March	20th March	22nd March	6th April	2nd May

Kerala (Single Phase Elections)

Issuance of Notification	12th March
Scrutiny of nomination	20th March
Last date for withdrawal of nomination	22nd March
Polling Day	6th April
Counting of Votes- Result	2nd May

By-election to Malappuram constituency to be conducted simultaneously on April 6.

Tamil Nadu (Single Phase Elections)	
Issuance of Notification	12th March
Last Date for filing of nomination	19th March
Scrutiny of nomination	20th March
Last date for withdrawal of nomination	22nd March
Polling Day	6th April
Counting of Votes- Result	2nd May

Elections to Kanyakumari Parliamentary Constituency to be conducted simultaneously.

Puducherry (Single Phase Elections)	
Issuance of Notification	12th March
Last Date for filing of nomination	19th March
Scrutiny of nomination	20th March
Last date for withdrawal of nomination	22nd March
Polling Day	6th April
Counting of Votes- Result	2nd May

West Bengal Election Schedule - 8 Phase Election

Phases	Issue of Notifications	Last Date of Notifications	Scrutiny of Nominations	Last Date for withdrawal of Nominations	Date of Polls	Counting of Votes/ Result Day
Phase 1 (30 ACs)	2nd March	9th March	10th March	12th March	7th March	2nd May
Phase 2 (30 ACs)	5th March	12th March	15th March	17th March	1st April	2nd May
Phase 3 (31 ACs)	12th March	19th March	20th March	22nd March	6th April	2nd May
Phase 4 (44 ACs)	16th March	23rd March	24th March	26th March	10th April	2nd May
Phase 5 (45 ACs)	23rd March	30th March	31st March	3rd April	17th April	2nd May
Phase 6 (43 ACs)	26th March	3rd April	5th April	7th April	2nd April	2nd May
Phase 7 (36 ACs)	31st March	7th April	8th April	12th April	6th April	2nd May
Phase 8 (35 ACs)	31st March	7th April	8th April	12th April	9th April	2nd May

Key Highlights

- A total of 824 Assembly Constituencies will be going to polls during these elections.
- Around 18.68 crore electors will cast vote at 2.7 lakh polling stations in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Kerala, Assam and Puducherry.
- All polling stations to be on the ground floor.
- The EC is keeping a close watch on the health situation of the states going to polls.
- All poll workers will be vaccinated as they are frontline workers.

Steps taken to mitigate spread of COVID-19-

- Concept of absentee voters introduced
- Postal Ballot option was continued as an option for senior citizens
- Nodal health officers are appointed at state/ district levels
- Separate SOPs are there for COVID-19 patients, suspects and those under quarantine
- Polling time will be increased by one hour
- Several measures taken to minimise people-to-people contact
- Road shows allowed subject to break after every five vehicles
- Advance teams have been sent to all the five states and UTs
- Adequate CAPFs deployment shall be ensured during elections
- All critical, vulnerable polling stations identified and an adequate number of CAPFs will be deployed

MCC comes into force

The Chief Election Commissioner announced that the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) will come into force immediately with these announcements. Citizens can use **eVIGIL app** to report any violation of MCC.

Background

The terms of the legislative assemblies of the five states/ UT- Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, West Bengal and Assam will come to end either in May or June 2021.

The Assembly Elections are due for 234 seats in Tamil Nadu, 294 seats in West Bengal, 140 seats in Kerala, 126 seats in Assam and 30 seats in Union Territory of Puducherry.

Central government appoints high-level team to review medical arrangements for Kumbh Mela

The Central Government deployed a high-level team to Haridwar on March 15, 2021, for reviewing the medical care and public health arrangements for Kumbh Mela. It is scheduled to held from April 1 to April 30, 2021.

The High-level team will be led by Dr. SK Singh, Director of National Centre for Disease Control- NCDC along with Dr. SK Singh, Additional Director, and Dr. Meera Dhuria, Deputy Director. Both will be from the NCDC as other team members.



What will be the role of the team?

- The high-level team, among others, will focus on the status of the implementation of the SoP (Standard Operating Procedure) for Kumbh Mela. It has been issued by the Health and Family Welfare Ministry in the context of implementing preventive measures to contain the spread of Coronavirus during Kumbh.
- The team by the central government will also be reviewing the implementation of its field-level recommendations that have been given to the state during its last visit in February 2021.

Reduction in Kumbh Mela's duration:

Earlier in February 2021, the Uttarakhand government had decided to limit the mela to just 30 days from earlier 3 months. The decision was taken to prevent the spread of Coronavirus infection by reducing the duration of the pilgrimage.

Registration mandatory for Kumbh Mela pilgrims:

The government, to control the spread of the infection, has made passes mandatory for the pilgrims who plan on attending Kumbh Mela. As per the rules, the passes to the pilgrims will be issued only after they have submitted the negative RT-PCR test. All the devotees will also have to register themselves first on the web portal of Kumbh Mela 2021.

Background:

Kumbh Mela is one of the largest mass gatherings. The pilgrimage is celebrated 4 times over a course of 12 years. The mela spans around 4 different locations in India- Haridwar, Prayag, Nashik, and Ujjain.

Government launches new scheme for tourist vehicle operators

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has announced a new scheme under which any tourist vehicle operator will be able to apply for an 'All India Tourist Authorisation/ Permit' via online mode. The step has been taken to promote tourism as well as to grow state revenues.

The Ministry has also informed that a new set of rules will be known as 'All India Tourist Vehicles Authorization and Permit Rules, 2021' and will be applicable from April 1, 2021.

The permit will only be issued to the tourist vehicle operator after the submission of the relevant documents and the fees within 30 days of the submission of the applications. However, all the existing permits will continue to be in force during their validity.

Significance

According to the official release, the new rules for the permits are expected to go a long way to promote tourism across the states in the country, while also growing the revenue of the state governments.

The move was discussed in the 39th and 40th Transport Development Council meetings and was also appreciated by the participants in the state.

The rules come as the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways is in the pursuit of providing easy movement to the tourist passenger vehicles, after the success of the goods carriage vehicles under the National Permit Regime.

About All India Tourist Authorisation Scheme:

- The scheme will allow flexibility in form of the permit or authorization being granted for a period of 3 months or more, and not exceeding three years at a time.
- The provision by the government is aimed at keeping in mind the areas where there is a limited season of tourism and also those operators who have limited financial capacity.
- The scheme will also consolidate a central database and the fees of all such permits/authorization, which may give a sense of scope for improvements, a sense of tourist movements, promotion of tourism.

Growth in the travel and tourism industry:

The step of launching the new scheme has come in the context of the travel and tourism industry in increasing the manifold in the last 15 years.

The growth in tourism in India has been contributed by both international and domestic tourists and there has also been a trend of high expectation and consumer experience.

Government launches 'Mera Ration' mobile app



Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution on March 12, 2021 launched "Mera Ration" Mobile App for those ration card holders who migrate to new places in search of livelihood.

Currently, 32 States and Union Territories are covered under One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) and the remaining four States

and UTs are expected to be integrated into the scheme in the next few months.

The One Nation One Ration Card system covers almost 69 crore National Food Security Act (NFSA) beneficiaries in the country. The scheme has proven to be of tremendous value-added service to each NFSA beneficiary during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially migrants, as it allowed them to avail the benefit of subsidised foodgrains.

What is National Food Security Act?

Under National Food Security Act, the centre provides highly subsidised foodgrains at Rs 1-3 per kg to over 81 crore people through public distribution system (PDS).

The act also offers ration card portability service 'One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)' in 32 states and union territories.

Mera Ration app

- The beneficiaries will be able to use the 'Mera Ration' app to identify the nearest fair price shop and check details of their entitlement and recent transactions.
- The android-based mobile application has been developed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC).

- It is currently available in Hindi and English language. Gradually, it will be made available in 14 languages. The languages will be identified based on places where migrant people move mostly to.

Objective

The new mobile app aims to facilitate the ONORC-related services among NFSA beneficiaries, particularly migrant beneficiaries and fair price shop (FPS) or ration shop dealers and other stakeholders.

Key Features

- The migrant beneficiaries will be able to register their migration details through the mobile app.
- The beneficiaries can register themselves before starting their journey and the system will automatically allocate the entitled foodgrains.
- The NFSA beneficiaries will be able to use the app to identify the nearest FPS and check details of their foodgrains entitlement and the previous six-month transactions and status of Aadhaar seeding.
- Through the app, the beneficiary will know what he is entitled to and he need not ask FPS dealer how much he would get.
- The beneficiaries can login into the app using their Aadhaar or ration card number.

Azadi ka Amrut Mahotsav: PM Modi flags off padyatra in Gujarat to commemorate 75th year of Independence

PM Modi inaugurated the curtain-raiser activities of 'Azadi ka Amrut Mahotsav' and flagged off Padyatra from Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, Gujarat on March 12, 2021, to mark the 75 years of India's Independence.

To celebrate the 75 years of India's Independence, several states and UTs will be organizing programmes all over the country after PM Modi will inaugurate the curtain-raiser activities of Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav.

In addition to these programmes, the Zonal Cultural Centres and the Archaeological Survey of India under the Youth Affairs Ministry, Ministry of Culture, and TRIFED will also plan various activities to mark the occasion.

A National Implementation Committee which will be headed by the Union Home Minister Amit Shah has also been constituted to talk about the policies and planning of various events that will be undertaken to commemorate the 75 years of India's Independence.

Azadi ka Amrut Mahotsav website launched:

Prime Minister Modi before flagging off the padyatra has launched the Azadi ka Amrut Mahotsav website. He also addressed the crowd on the occasion.

Why Azadi ka Amrut Mahotsav is being celebrated?

Azadi ka Amrut Mahotsav is a series of events that have been organised by the Government of India to commemorate the 75th anniversary of India's Independence. The curtain raiser activities of the Mahotsav will begin from March 12, which is 75 weeks prior to August 15, 2022.

Theme of Azadi ka Amrut Mahotsav:

The mega event will be witnessing the inauguration of activities that have been planned under the theme 'India@75' such as a website, film, Aatmanirbhar Charkha, song, and Aatmanirbhar incubator.

PM Modi to flag off padayatra in Gujarat:

The Padyatra flagged off by PM Modi will be undertaken by 81 marchers from Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad to Dandi in Navsari. It will be a journey of 241 miles that will end on April 5, 2021, lasting for 25 days.

The Padyatra in Gujarat will be joined by the different groups of people on the way to Dandi. The Union Minister Prahalad Singh Patel will be leading the first lap of 75 km of the padayatra. He will also stay overnight with the padyatris and padyatra will start from the same place the next day.

This day also marks the historic salt march of Mahatma Gandhi as it was on March 12, 1930, that he began Dandi March from Sabarmati Ashram against the Salt Laws of Britishers along with 81 padyatris.

Indian States and UTs celebrate Azadi ka Amrut Mahotsav

Maharashtra: The state government will hold various programmes on March 12 related to Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav. The Chief Minister of Maharashtra Uddhav Thackray will flag off the freedom heritage walk from August Kranti Maidan in Mumbai and freedom fighters will also be felicitated to celebrate the occasion.

Uttar Pradesh: Series of events and activities will be held across the state as part of the 'Azadi ka Amrut Mahotsav'. It will mark the beginning of nationwide celebrations of the 75th anniversary of India's Independence. CM Yogi Adityanath will be taking part in an event in Lucknow while the state governor Anandi Ben Patel will be present in Ballia.

Madhya Pradesh: The state will be celebrating 75 years of India's Independence in a great manner. The government will be organising the programmes at 75 locations in the state. Programmes will also be organised in those places where the immortal saga of freedom struggle exists apart from the district headquarters.

The mainly identified sites in the state are associated with the freedom fighters such as Rani Durgavati, Chandrashekhar Azad, Taty Tope, Birsa Munda, and many others.

Guwahati: To mark the 75 years of India's Independence, the Principal Director General of AIR will be inaugurating an exhibition in Guwahati. The Directorate of Information and Public Relations will also be organising an exhibition in the state.

Gujarat: Apart from the Padyatra in Ahmedabad, the Azadi ka Amrut Mahotsav will be celebrated through 75 events in the state. Various patriotic programmes will be taking place at several places in Gujarat and apart from this other events such as bike rallies, cultural programmes, tree plantation will also be conducted.

Sikkim: A four-day photo exhibition on the freedom fighters will be held from March 12 as part of Azadi ka Amrut Mahotsav commemorating the 75th anniversary of India's Independence. Various cultural performances such as patriotic songs and skits of the Dandi march have also been planned.

Telangana: As part of the nationwide celebrations, Telangana is all set to launch 'Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav'. The celebrations will mainly be held at two places Hyderabad and Warangal. CM K. Chandrashekhara Rao will unfurl the national flag to start the celebrations which will continue for 75 weeks all over the state.

Delhi: The state government will start the year-long activities with an event in Connaught Place. The Department of Delhi Tourism will be organising the events highlighting the city's role in the freedom movement as well as its journey in the last 75 years. The government will also showcase the vision of Delhi in the year 2047 when India will be completing its 100 years of independence.

Union Cabinet approves creation of Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi as single non-lapsable reserve fund



The Union Cabinet on March 10, 2021 approved Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi (PMSSN) as a single non-lapsable reserve fund for a share of Health from the proceeds of Health and Education Cess levied under Section 136-b of Finance Act, 2007.

Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi: Key Highlights

- The Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi is a non-lapsable reserve fund for Health in the Public Account.
- The proceeds from the share of health in the Health and Education Cess will be credited into PMSSN.
- The **revenue earned** into the PMSSN will be utilized for Health Ministry's flagship schemes such as National Health Mission, Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, Ayushman Bharat - Health and Wellness Centres and for emergency and disaster preparedness and responses during health emergencies.

- The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare will oversee the administration and maintenance of the PMSSN.

Benefit

The major benefit of the fund will be to ensure enhanced access to universal & affordable health care through the availability of earmarked resources while ensuring that the amount does not lapse at the end of the fiscal year.

Significance

Health is extremely important to achieve an improved developmental outcome, as better health leads to better productivity.

Health and Nutrition have a bearing on productivity and income and health outcomes depend substantially on public spending on health.

Prime Minister Modi inaugurates 'Maitri Setu' between India and Bangladesh

PM Modi inaugurated 'Maitri Setu' connecting India and Bangladesh virtually on March 9, 2021. During the event, he also laid the foundation stone and inaugurated multiple infrastructure projects in Tripura.

The 'Maitri Setu' bridge between India and Bangladesh has been constructed over the Feni river which flows between Bangladesh and the Indian boundary in Tripura. The name Maitri Setu is the symbol of the growing friendly and bilateral relations between both the neighbouring countries.



The Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina also attended the launch of Maitri Setu via video conference. While speaking on the occasion, the PM of Bangladesh mentioned that the opening of any bridge is testimony to the Bangladesh government's continued commitment to support India in strengthening the connectivity in the region, particularly Northeast India.

Maitri Setu: Key details

- The building of Maitri Setu was taken up by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited at a cost of Rs. 133 crores.
- The 1.9 km long bridge will join Sabroom in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh. It will start a new chapter for trade and people and to people movement between the two countries.
- With the inauguration of Maitri Setu, Tripura will become the Gateway of the Northeast region with access to Chittagong Port in Bangladesh, just 80 km from Sabroom.

Integrated Check Post at Sabroom:

- PM will lay the foundation stone to set up an integrated check post at Sabroom.
- The check post will help in easing the movement of passengers and goods between India and Bangladesh. It will also provide new market opportunities for the products of Northeast states and will assist in the seamless movement of passengers.
- The project has been taken up by the Lands Port Authority of India worth Rs. 232 crores.

Laying the foundation stone of NH 208:

- PM Modi will lay the foundation stone of NH 208. It will connect the Unakoti district headquarters at Kailashahar in the state with the Khowai district headquarters.
- The 80 km long NH 208 will provide an alternative route to NH 44. Its construction has been taken up by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited worth Rs. 1,078 crores.

Other projects to be inaugurated in Tripura:

- PM Modi will inaugurate State Highways and other district roads which have been developed by the state government worth Rs. 63.75 crores. The roads will provide all-weather connectivity to the citizens of Tripura.
- Prime Minister Modi will inaugurate 40,978 houses that have been constructed under the government's Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (urban) and has been completed at a cost of Rs. 813 crores.
- The integrated Command and Control Centre that has been built under Agartala Smart City Mission will also be inaugurated.
- PM Modi will also lay the foundation stone for the development of Commercial Complex and Multi-Level Car parking at Old Motor Stand which has been developed at a cost of Rs. 200 crores.
- The foundation stone will be laid for expanding the current road from Lichubagan to the airport in the state from 2 lanes to 4 lanes. The project has been implemented by Agartala Smart City Mission at a cost of Rs. 96 crores.

What is the new Railway Helpline Number?



The Indian Railways has merged all railway helpline numbers into a single number 139 for all queries, complaints, assistance, and quick grievance redressal during the journey.

The step has been taken to overcome the inconvenience over multiple helpline numbers. One single helpline number will be easy for commuters to remember and will

help them connect with Railways for all their needs during travel.

In order to inform and educate the passengers traveling from trains regarding the new helpline number, the Railway Ministry has also launched the social media campaign #OneRailOneHelpline139.

Key highlights:

- All the other railway helplines, including helpline number 182, will be discontinued and merged into 139 from April 1, 2021.
- The railway helpline number 139 will be available in twelve languages.
- Passengers will also be able to opt for Interactive Voice Response System- IVRS or can directly connect to call-center executives by pressing the asterisk button.
- There would be no need for a smartphone to call on 139. It will provide easy access to all mobile users.
- The merged helpline number, on an average basis, received 3,44,513 inquiries per day.

Merged helpline number: Key details

- The passenger has to press 1 for medical assistance and security.
- 2 for PNR status inquiry
- 4 for the general complaints
- 5 for vigilance related complaints
- 6 for parcel and goods related queries
- 7 for IRCTC operated train queries
- 8 for the complaint status
- 9 for talking to call centre executive

Centre to transform 2 Passport Seva Kendras into all women PSKs

The Union Minister of State for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan announced that two Passport Seva Kendras (PSK) will be transformed into "All Women PSK" on the occasion of International Women's Day on March 8, 2021. The initiative is being undertaken under the flagship Passport Seva Programme of the Ministry.

The two Passport Seva Kendras that will be transformed into all-women Passport Seva Kendras include one located at RK Puram, Bhikaji Cama Place, New Delhi and another at Tripunithura, Kochi, Kerala.

What is Passport Seva Programme?

The Passport Seva Programme is an ambitious programme of the Indian government, which helps deliver passport-related services to the citizens in India and those living abroad. It has emerged as one of the most successful passport delivery programmes.

Significance

The programme has helped take forward the vision of Digital India with the successful establishment of :

- i) Digital ecosystem that offers passport related services to the Indian citizens at their doorstep
- ii) Ensuring smooth governance and ease of services
- iii) Digitally empowering the citizens

Centre's initiatives to improve passport service delivery

- The centre has taken various steps to bring improvements in the delivery of passport services to the citizens in India and those living outside the country.
- Due to the centre's efforts, 93 Passport Seva Kendras and 426 Post Office Passport Seva Kendras apart from the existing 36 Passport Offices were made operational across the country.
- The programme was also extended to 190 Indian Mission and Posts abroad, establishing a global footprint.
- The centre also took steps to simplify the passport process, manuals and rules.
- The centre has also taken steps to empower women as a part of the Passport Seva Programme. A total of 1670 women employees were deployed in the Passport Seva Programme.

Benefits

These steps have helped deliver passport services to the citizens in a timely, transparent, more accessible, reliable manner through streamlined processes, committed, trained and motivated workforce.

The programme has helped issue passports to more than 2.76 crores applicants till date. Around 1.03 crore passports have been issued to women applicants in the last 3 years, which amounts to 35 percent of the total applicants.

WCD Ministry, Invest India sign MoU to enhance cooperation in Nutrition, Child Protection & Development



The Women and Child Development Ministry under the Government of India signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Invest India on March 8, 2021 to enhance co-operation in Nutrition, Child Protection and Development.

The agreement also includes cooperation in women empowerment and convergent

capacity building in mission mode.

The MoU was signed by Joint Secretary in the Women and Child Development Ministry Aditi Das Raut and Vice President, Invest India, Hindol Sengupta in New Delhi.

Key Highlights

- Under the agreement, the Invest India Missions will support WCD Ministry's efforts in international cooperation, impact assessment, strategic and policy support and sustained behaviour change communication.
- Invest India will also support the WCD Ministry in the creation of a participatory ecosystem that is propelled towards creating large-scale impact.

- Invest India's DHRISHTI will conduct input and output analysis research and other research as per requirement.
- It will also coordinate with research agencies for primary, secondary and tertiary research to form, design and conduct strategic research for the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

What is Invest India?

Invest India is the National Investment Promotion and Facilitation Agency of the Indian Government, which serves as the first point of reference for the global investment community.

Women and Child Development Ministry classifies major programmes under 3 Umbrella schemes

The Women and Child Development Minister informed on March 8, 2021, that it has decided to classify all of its major programmes under three Umbrella Schemes- Mission Shakti, Mission Poshan 2.0, and Mission Vatsalya- for their better implementation.

According to the ministry, the step has been taken for the effective implementation of various programmes and schemes of the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

Women and Children constitute around 67.7% of the country's population according to the 2011 census. The empowerment and protection of women and children and ensuring their wholesome development have always been crucial for the sustainable and equitable development of India.

Under Mission Shakti:

As per WCD Ministry, Mission Shakti will consist of the schemes and policies for the empowerment and protection of women. The government has also allocated Rs. 3,109 crores for the scheme in the 2021-2022 budget.



The schemes covered under Mission Shakti will be:

- One-Stop Centre
- Mahila Police Volunteer
- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao
- Women's helpline
- Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana

Mission Poshan 2.0:

The Women and Child Development Ministry informed that the government will be merging the Poshan Abhiyan and supplementary nutrition programme to launch Mission Poshan 2.0.

Mission Poshan 2.0 will look into the ways and measures for strengthening the nutritional content, outreach, delivery, and outcomes. In the budget 2021-2022, the government has allocated an amount of Rs. 20,105 crores to Mission Poshan 2.0.

Mission Vatsalya:

The Ministry has informed that Mission Vatsalya will be looking into the child welfare services and child protection services all over the country. The central government has allocated Rs. 900 crores in the budget 2021-2022 for Mission Vatsalya.

PM Modi dedicates 7500th Janaushadhi kendra to nation, urges to buy medicines from kendra at affordable prices

Prime Minister Modi on March 7, 2021, dedicated to the nation the 7500th Janaushadhi Kendra at North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences, Shillong via video conferencing.

PM Modi during the event addressed Janaushadhi Diwas celebrations and interacted with the beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana. He also gave awards to the stakeholders by recognizing their excellent work in the field.

The Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers D V Sadananda Gowda was also present at the event. Pradhan Mantri Bharatiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana initiative aims at providing quality medicines at an affordable price to the general public.

PM Modi urges to buy medicines from Janaushadhi kendras:

Prime Minister Modi while speaking at the event urged the citizens to buy medicines from the Janaushadhi kendras at a reasonable and affordable price.

While interacting with a beneficiary, he mentioned that medicines are expensive, that why there is Jan Aushadhi Yojana for the poor which helps in saving their money. He further urged people to buy medicines at a reasonable cost from 'Modi ki Dukaan'.

Government plans to reach the target of 10,000 kendras:

PM Modi while addressing the Janaushadhi Diwas informed that the central government plans on reaching a target of opening 10,000 Janaushadhi Kendras very soon and added that these centres have been helping people in saving around Rs. 3,600 crores annually.

While talking about the initiative, Prime Minister highlighted that the country had less than 100 centres till 2014 but the current government plans on opening 10,000 kendras. He also requested all the state governments to take a pledge for 75 Janaushadhi centres each in 75 districts on the 75th year of India's Independence.

How Janaushadhi Kendras are benefitting people?

- The scheme has been supporting the poor and middle-class families and is also becoming a medium of service and employment.
- People, at Janaushadhi Kendras, get affordable medicines and youth is getting employment.
- At the kendras, the sanitary pads are being available at just Rs. 2.5 and more than 11,000 crores sanitary napkins have already been sold at the Janaushadhi Kendras.
- More than 1000 kendras are being run by women and the scheme has been empowering the self-reliance among the women of the country.
- With an aim of expanding the scheme, the incentives of these centres have been increased from Rs. 2.5 lakh to Rs. 5 lakhs. Apart from this, an

additional incentive of Rs. 2 lakh has also been given to the tribals, Dalit, women, and the people of the northeast.

- The government has also taken a decision to make available 75 Ayush Medicines across the Janaushadhi Kendras in India.

Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana:

The initiative by the central government aims at providing quality medicines at an affordable price to the citizens of the country. The number of stores under the government's scheme has now grown to 749, under which all the districts of the country have been covered.

Sales in the FY 2020-2021 have led to a total savings of approx. Rs. 3,600 crores for the common citizens of India as the medicines available under the initiative are cheaper by 50% to 90% than the corresponding market rates.

Janaushadhi week:

For creating more awareness about Janaushadhi, an entire week from March 1 to March 7 was celebrated as '**Janaushadhi Week**' all over the country. The theme was 'Jan Aushadhi- Seva bhi, Rozgar bhi', and the last day of the week was celebrated as the 'Janaushadhi diwas'.

SC bars courts from taking up contempt pleas against EPFO regarding judgements on employees' pension

The Supreme Court has barred courts across India from taking up contempt petitions against the Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) and Centre regarding implementation of judgments that stated that employees' pension can't be capped at Rs 15,000.

This follows the apex court's February 2, 2021 decision recalling its order that could have led to higher pension for employees as it had removed the salary ceiling of Rs 15,000 and said it should be proportionate to the last drawn salary.

No contempt application seeking implementation of any of the orders passed in the aforesaid four categories of matters, shall be taken up by any court, said the SC Bench headed by Justice UU Lalit in its February 25th order.

The bench has posted the matter for further hearing on March 23.

Key Details

- The Kerala High Court had in October 2018 set aside the amendments in the Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS), 1995 that fixed maximum pensionable salary at Rs 15,000 per month.
- The Supreme Court dismissed the appeal filed by the EPFO against the Kerala High Court's verdict on April 1, 2019.
- Both Centre and EPFO had filed petitions requesting the top court to review its decision.
- The Supreme Court then allowed the review petitions on February 2nd and decided to reconsider the previous order that permitted grant of provident fund pension proportionate to salary.
- The Supreme Court is now examining the 2018 Kerala High Court judgment again that required the organisation to pay full pension to retiring employees based on their total salary instead of capping the amount at Rs 15000.

Union Cabinet approves pact between India, Fiji for co-operation in agriculture sector



The Indian Government on March 3, 2021, approved a pact between India and Fiji for co-operation in agriculture and the allied sectors.

The Union Cabinet, chaired by PM Modi, gave its approval to the signing of MoU between the Ministry of Agriculture, India and the Agriculture Ministry of the Republic of Fiji. The agreement will come into effect on

the date of its signing and will remain in force for 5 years.

The Memorandum of Understanding signed between India and Fiji will provide for cooperation in various areas which will include the promotion of joint ventures between the private sectors of both countries.

MoU signed between India and Fiji: Key Highlights

- The MoU will provide for an exchange of scientific experts, research personnel, technical trainees, and specialists; development of infrastructure for agriculture; technology transfer; development of human resources through training officers and farmers by conducting workshops and seminars.
- India and Fiji will work together for the promotion of investment in value addition and marketing of agricultural commodities.
- The agriculture ministries of both countries will promote capacity development in all the areas of agriculture as well as the direct trade of agriculture products.
- The ministries, through MoU, will also do joint planning and development of research proposals as well as the execution of programmes and research projects.

Indo-Fiji Working Group:

A Joint Working Group between India and Fiji will also be constituted under the MoU. The group will set down the plan, procedures and will recommend programmes of cooperation towards achieving its aim with the help of executing agencies of both nations. The Joint group will hold its meeting alternatively in Fiji and India once every two years.

Economy

US becomes second biggest oil supplier of India



The United States has overtaken Saudi Arabia as the second-biggest oil supplier of India in February 2021, as the refiners boosted the cheap U.S. crude purchases to record levels to offset supply cuts by OPEC—Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

The switch in supplies, triggered by the lower demand for U.S. crude, coincided with Saudi's voluntary extra 1 million bpd output cut on top of an agreement by OPEC+ and its allies in order to maintain lower production.

India as the third-biggest oil importer and consumer of the world had repeatedly called on major oil producers to ease the supply curbs in order to aid global economic recovery. The country had also pointed to Saudi's voluntary cuts for contributing to a spike in the oil prices globally.

Oil supply from US increases:

The oil imports by India from the US- the global top producer- rose to 48% to a record 5,45,300 barrels per day (bpd) in February 2021 from the prior month. It accounted for 14% of India's overall imports last month.

In contrast, the imports in February from Saudi fell by 42% from the previous month to a decade-low of 4,45,200 bpd. Saudi Arabi, which consistently has been one of India's top two suppliers has slipped to 4th position for the first time since January 2006.

Why the increase in supply from the US took place?

As the demand in the US was weak and refineries were running at low rates, the US crude oil had to go somewhere and Asia was identified as the only region which saw the rapid demand recovery.

Due to diplomatic conflicts and trade problems, China was out of the question to not take US oil so India was the obvious choice in the Asian region.

Iraq continues to be the top oil seller to India:

Iraq has continued to be the top seller of oil to India. The country has maintained its position despite a 23% decline in oil purchases to a five-month low of 8,67,500 bpd.

As the second-largest producer of OPEC, Iraq reduced the annual supplies of oil to several Indian refiners. The step was taken to meet its obligations under the group's production deal.

BRICS contact group holds first meeting on trade and economic issues



According to the official statement, the BRICS Contact Group on Economic and Trade Issues- CGETI held its first meeting under the Chairmanship of India from March 9 to March 11, 2021.

The theme of BRICS 2021 is 'BRICS@15: Intra BRICS Cooperation for Continuity, Consolidation, and Consensus'.

The BRICS member nations appreciated the activities planned by India, being relevant and timely in the current context. They also expressed their support for working together on various initiatives that have been proposed by India.

BRICS CGETI under India's Chairmanship:

India presented a calendar of events for BRICS CGETI 2021 under its Chairmanship which included the priority areas for schedule, deliverables, and scope of the MSME roundtable conference workshop on the services statistics and BRICS Trade fair.

This was then followed by a series of presentations which were scheduled in separate sessions. The presentations were made by the concerned departments on the proposed deliverables.

According to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, each of the sessions was then followed by detailed feedback sessions.

Proposed deliverables:

- Action Plan based on the document strategy for the BRICS Economic Partnership 2025. It was adopted during Russian Presidency in 2020.
- BRICS cooperation on the multilateral trading system included cooperation for TRIPS waiver proposal at WTO.
- Framework for the protection of consumers on e-commerce.
- Non-tariff measures resolution mechanism.
- The working mechanism of sanitary and phytosanitary.
- Cooperation Framework for genetic resources protection and traditional knowledge.
- BRICS Framework on the cooperation in professional services.

27th Official level CGETI meeting:

The Inter-sessional deliberations will be carried out till September 2021 in order to reach a consensus among the BRICS member countries. The officers of BRICS tasked with CGETI will continue working for the 27th Official Level CGETI meeting which has been scheduled to be held in June 2021.

India flags off first consignment of 'red rice' to US

The first consignment of 'red rice' was flagged off on March 4, 2021, to the United States of America from Assam, giving a major boost to India's rice export potential.

Red rice is rich in iron and the variety is grown in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, without using any form of chemical fertilizer. The exported rice variety is known as 'Bao-dhaan', which is also an integral part of the Assamese food.



The flagging-off ceremony of the export consignments of red rice was performed by the Chairman of Agricultural & Processed Food Products Export Development Authority- APEDA at Haryana.

The red rice is being sourced from India by the leading rice exporter- LT Foods. As the export of red rice will increase, it will further facilitate enhancing the incomes of the farming families of the Brahmaputra flood plains.

Promotion to rice exports:

The Agricultural & Processed Food Products Export Development Authority has been promoting rice exports with various stakeholders through collaborations in value chains.

The Rice Export Promotion Forum- REPF was set up by the Indian Government, under the aegis of APEDA. REPF also has representations from exporters, the rice industry, the ministry of commerce, officials from APEDA, and directors of agriculture from the major rice-producing states including Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Haryana, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Assam.

Increase in the shipment of non-basmati rice:

In 2020-21, during the April-January period, the shipment of the non-basmati rice saw an impressive spike. The exports of non-basmati rice were Rs. 26,058 crores

during April-January, 2021 against Rs. 11,543 crores reported during April-January 2020. In the rupee term, the exports of non-basmati rice witnessed a growth of 125%.

The remarkable increase in the export of rice at a time where pandemic disrupted the supply of many commodities, has been due to the measures taken by the Indian government to ensure the rice export while taking all the safety precautions.

The Chairman of APEDA stated that the government took several steps for ensuring hygiene and safety because of the health challenges posed by the pandemic while ensuring that the exports continue without interruption.

Government lifts restriction on private banks to engage in government-related business



The Central Government on February 24, 2021, decided to remove the ban on the private sector banks to conduct government-related banking transactions.

Earlier, only a few private banks were allowed to engage in the government businesses such as pension payments, taxes and other revenue payment facilities, small saving schemes, etc. According to the Finance Ministry, the step will further spur competition, enhance customer convenience, higher efficiency in the standards of customer services.

The Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman while sharing the news on her official Twitter account mentioned that private sector banks can now be equal partners in strengthening the government's social sector initiatives, in the development of the country's economy, and enhancing customer convenience.

No authorization by RBI:

With the restriction on private banks being lifted, there is now no bar on the Reserve Bank of India for the authorization of the private sector banks, in addition to public sector banks, for the government business which includes the government agency business. The decision has already been conveyed to RBI.

Effort to boost privatization:

As per the statement released by the government, private sector banks are at the forefront of implementing and imbibing the latest technology and innovation in banking.

The step can also be seen as an extension of PM Modi's speech in Lok Sabha during the Budget Session where he pitched for privatization. The statements by the Prime Minister had come in a backdrop of a push towards government spending, which they expect will help crowd in the private investment.

Government signs \$304 million loan agreement with AIIB for Assam Power Transmission Project



The Finance Ministry informed on February 23, 2021, that the Central government has inked a loan agreement worth \$304 million with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank-AIIB for strengthening the electricity transmission system of Assam.

The loan agreement was signed by Rajat Mishra, acting director-general of investment operations at

AIIB, and Baldeo Purushartha, Joint Secretary at the Economic Affairs Department on behalf of the Indian Government.

The total estimated cost of the project in Assam is \$365 million, out of which \$304 million will be provided by AIIB and the rest of the amount by the Assam State Government. The loan from AIIB comes with a maturity of 24 years along with a grace period of 5 years.

Objective:

The funds from AIIB will be used for improving the existing power transmission network in Assam and will build new networks for ensuring affordable and reliable power supply in the state.

Assam Power Transmission Project:

- The Assam Power Transmission project seeks to address the substantial energy deficit faced by the state on the account of congestion in transmission networks and electricity distribution.
- The project will include laying a transmission line and construction of 10 transmission substations. Apart from this, 15 other existing substations will also be upgraded and the existing transmission lines will be converted to the optical power wire.
- It will also help in reducing greenhouse emissions and will also improve the quality of the power supply to the ultimate consumers.
- It will strengthen the existing intrastate transmission network of the state by augmenting it with new networks for achieving secure, affordable, reliable, and efficient power.

Assam faces energy deficit:

Assam has been currently witnessing an energy deficit, especially during peak hours and one of the main reasons behind it is the transmission networks and congestion of electricity distribution.

Currently, the Assam Electricity Grid Corporation, the sole transmission utility of the state, manages the maintenance, operation, and development of 66 substations along with 6,882 megavolt-ampere capacity as well as a network of 5,701 circuit km of the transmission lines.

India inks free trade agreement with Mauritius, provides additional 1,00,000 COVID-19 vaccines

India and Mauritius on February 22, 2021, signed free trade agreement along with 5 key pacts. This is the first such agreement of India with an African country and it was signed during the visit of EAM S Jaishankar to the island nation.

The External Affairs Minister while addressing the media with the PM of Mauritius mentioned that India is privileged to have entered CECPA- Comprehensive Cooperation and Partnership Agreement with Mauritius.

India also delivered 1,00,000 doses of Made in India Coronavirus vaccines to Mauritius. The country had already supplied 1,00,000 doses earlier.

Significance of Free Trade Agreement:

According to EAM S. Jaishankar, the agreement will provide a timely boost for the revival of post-COVID-19 economies.

It will also enable the Indian investors to use the island nation as a launchpad for the business expansion into Africa helping the prospect of Mauritius emerging as a 'hub of Africa'.

He further added that CECPA will boost the dynamism of the services sector in Mauritius. It can facilitate Indian investment in the country, particularly the ICT sector, as the Indian companies can be benefitted by leveraging the bilingual prowess of the island country for the investments in Francophone Africa.

Comprehensive Cooperation and Partnership Agreement: Key Highlights

- It will provide preferential access to Mauritius for the bulk of trade as well as also for many aspirational items in the future in the Indian market consisting of over a billion people.
- The items include specialty sugar, frozen fish, fresh fruits, biscuits, soaps, mineral water, juices, medical and surgical equipment, bags, and apparel.

- Under the agreement, Mauritius will be getting preferential access for the export of 40,000 tonnes of sugar in India at an early time frame. In a similar way, there will also be an excess for the export of 7.5 million pieces of apparel.
- India, as regards trade in services, has offered 95 sub-sectors from 11 broad services sectors. This contributes 76% of the GDP of the island nation.
- Other agreements signed between India and Mauritius:
- Both the countries signed another agreement under which India will be providing an Advanced Light Helicopter 'Dhruv' and a Dornier aircraft on lease to Mauritius on a gratis basis for two years.
- A pact for the special US \$100 million Defence Line of Credit was also signed between India and Mauritius.

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Environment & Ecology

Jal Shakti Ministry launches framework for water monitoring and quality testing



The Jal Shakti Ministry on March 13, 2021, launched guidelines, the framework for monitoring, testing, and surveillance of drinking water quality.

The Ministry also launched Water Quality Information Management System- WQMIS, an online portal that will be providing detailed information on the laboratories for this

purpose.

The guidelines by the Jal Shakti Ministry specify work to be done in terms of monitoring and surveillance of the water quality at the state, block/tehsil, and village levels. They have been prepared in consultation with the Indian Council of Medical Research.

Objective:

According to the Additional Secretary and Mission Director of the National Jeevan Mission, Bharat Lal, the objective of the exercise is to instill a sense of confidence about the quality of water as well as that the people can also test the water quality.

He further added that a database of 2,200 laboratories have been prepared across India so that the water quality can be tested.

What are the prescribed water quality parameters under the guidelines?

- pH Value
- Total Dissolved Solids
- Turbidity
- Chloride
- Total alkalinity
- Total Hardness
- Sulphate

- Iron
- Total Arsenic
- Fluoride
- Nitrate
- Total Coliform bacteria
- e.coli

Why the framework for water quality testing and monitoring is significant?

As per the 2018 assessment done by the Central Ground Water Board, 52% of all the blocks in India have inter alia any one of the contaminants such as fluoride, arsenic, chloride, nitrate, iron, and salinity.

Nearly 20 states in the country have a drinking water source which is contaminated with fluoride, arsenic, iron, nitrate, heavy metals, or salinity.

Apart from these, there are also 61 districts on priority across 5 states that have been identified by the Health and Family Welfare Ministry which are affected by Japanese Encephalitis.

Water quality significant part of Jal Jeevan Mission:

Gajendra Singh Sherawat, Jal Shakti Minister on the occasion informed that the aim of the Jal Shakti Mission is to provide functional tap water connections by the year 2024 to all the rural households of the country and water quality is a significant aspect of it.

The entire cost of the Jal Jeevan Mission is Rs. 3,60,000 crores and around 2% of it has been dedicated to water quality.

Research team finds 24 bat Coronaviruses in Southwestern China

An international team of scientists, during the search for an origin of Coronavirus, have found 24 previously unknown bat coronaviruses. Out of 24, 4 of the bat coronaviruses that are related to the strain that causes COVID-19 have been found within a 4 km radius in Southwestern China.

One virus was carrying a genomic backbone which is arguably the closest to SARS-CoV-2 identified to date, but none appeared to be a direct ancestor of the COVID-19 which was responsible for the pandemic.

China has continued to fund numerous research teams which have been collecting and studying the bat viruses across the country. Among the funded teams is the one led by Professor Shi Weifong of Shandong First Medical University responsible for the latest finding.

Bat-hunting scientists, particularly in China, have come under fire since the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, which is believed to have emerged from the animals.

Closest matching virus to SARS-CoV-2:

RpYN06, the closest matching virus had a 94.5 % similarity to SARS-CoV-2 across the whole genome. It is slightly lower than RaTG13 which was another bat virus collected in Yunnan several years ago with a 96% match.

As per Professor Shi Weifong and his colleagues, this suggests that an ancestor of SARS-CoV-2 had departed from RpYN06 and TG13 lineages decades ago and has gone through a recombination event by mingling with different viral species.

Difficulty in resolving the origins of the virus:

The Shanghai-based life scientist who has been studying the evolution of Coronaviruses explained that most of the new viruses have emerged from the tropical areas, where the abundant animal species and hot climate allows different forms of viruses to compete and mingle with one another to form a new variant.

The research team has warned that the discovery of so many unknown species in a small area was unexpected. They further added that the complexity of the host distributions can increase the difficulty in resolving the origins of SARS-CoV-2 as well as other pathogenic viruses.

Background:

The novel coronavirus which has been responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic was first isolated in Wuhan, China in January 2020. It was initially traced to a seafood market, where the major outbreak had occurred.

The former President of the US Donald Trump had often referred to it as the 'China Virus' and his administration had also pushed the theory that the virus had originated from the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

A team of WHO experts had launched a probe into the origin of the virus in Wuhan and had declared that the leakage of the virus from the laboratory is extremely unlikely.

Fossils of Dinosaurs from 140 million years ago discovered in Argentina



Researchers on March 1, 2021 announced the discovery of **fossils of Dinosaurs that lived 140 million years ago** in Argentina. The incomplete skeletal remains of the dinosaur were discovered south of Neuquen city in Argentina.

The fossils belong to Argentina's Patagonian wilderness, the oldest-known member of the dinosaur group known as titanosaurs that includes the largest land animals in Earth's history.

The researchers stated that the fossils represent a dinosaur species named *Ninjatitan zapatai*, which lived during the Cretaceous Period 140 million years ago. They identified Ninjatitan as a Titanosaur.

The Discovery: Key Highlights

- According to the researchers, the discovery demonstrated that the titanosaurs as a group first appeared longer ago than previously known.
- The study's lead author Pablo Gallina, who is a researcher at the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research of Argentina (CONICET), stated that "Titanosaurs are recorded on various sides of the world, but the oldest-known records were more modern than this find."
- Ninjatitan was a large dinosaur with a length of about 65 feet but it is much smaller than later titanosaurs such as *Argentinosaurus* that reached a length of around 115 feet (35 meters).

- As per the researchers, the presence of such an early titanosaur in Patagonia supports the theory that titanosaurs originated in the Southern Hemisphere.
- The findings of the study were published in a scientific journal called **Ameghiniana**.

About Titanosaurs

- Titanosaurs were a diverse group of long-necked plant-eating dinosaurs that walked on four pillar-like legs.
- They are a part of a larger dinosaur group of dinosaurs called sauropods which includes other dinosaurs with similar body designs such as Brontosaurus and Diplodocus that lived in North America during the Jurassic Period. This Jurassic Period precedes the Cretaceous Period.
- The titanosaurs were the last surviving group of long-necked sauropods.
- The grouping includes some of the largest land animals ever known to have existed on the Earth such as **Patagotitan**.
- Titanosaurs are only known about from less than 120 million years ago in Patagonia.

CSIR Floriculture Mission launched by

Dr. Harsh Vardhan

Union Health Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan launched '**CSIR Floriculture Mission**' through virtual mode in New Delhi on March 4, 2021. He encouraged scientists of CSIR laboratories across the country to develop the land available at each laboratory to be set up as a model under the "CSIR Floriculture Mission".

The CSIR Floriculture Mission has been approved for implementation in 21 States and Union Territories of India. Under the mission, the available knowledgebase in CSIR Institutes will be utilized and leveraged to help Indian farmers and industry re-position themselves to meet the import requirements.

CSIR Floriculture Mission: Key Highlights

The CSIR Floriculture Mission will be implemented in collaboration with several bodies including the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)-Directorate of Floriculture, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) and Universities, Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Ltd. (TRIFED), Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), Fragrance and Flavour Development Centre (FFDC) and the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC).

Objective

The CSIR Floriculture Mission aims to focus on commercial floral crops, seasonal/annual crops, cultivation of flower crops for honey bee rearing and wild ornaments.

Some of the popular floriculture crops include Marigold, Rose, Carnation, Chrysanthemum, Gladiolus, Gerbera, Canna, Lilium and Tuberose.

Significance

The CSIR Floriculture Mission is expected to create opportunities for entrepreneurship development in floriculture. Under the mission, CSIR will lead to infuse the latest technologies in the field of floriculture.

While addressing the launch event, Dr. Harsh Vardhan said, "Farmers have little knowledge about floriculture which can give 5 times more return than the traditional crops." He stated that floriculture has the potential to employ a large number of people through nursery raising, floriculture farming, entrepreneurship development for nursery trade, value addition and export.

The Minister also pointed out that India has diverse agro-climatic and edaphic conditions and rich plant diversity and despite this, it shares only 0.6 % of the global floriculture market. The Minister highlighted that India imports at least 1200 million USD worth of floriculture products every year from different countries.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan further highlighted that CSIR has been developing new floral varieties and several value addition technologies since 1953. He said through the CSIR

Floriculture Mission, agro-technologies, new varieties and value addition technologies available with the CSIR institutions, efforts are being made to take these to farmers and entrepreneurs and help them in multiplying their income.

He assured that the market linkage and trade-related issues will be solved with the partnership of APEDA, state horticulture departments and TRIFED and added that the convergence of Floriculture with Apiculture as envisaged in the mission will yield even greater benefits.

CSIR's Societal Portal



- Dr. Harsh Vardhan also launched CSIR's Societal Portal and its Android app.
- The portal has been developed by CSIR Team with the help of the MyGov Team to facilitate the public to submit the societal problems that can be resolved using science and technology interventions.
- The portal will assist in seeking inputs on challenges and problems being faced by different stakeholders in society and seek a scientific solution to them.
- It will be a people-centric solution science portal that will be accessible to all.

Background

The Indian floriculture market was worth Rs 15700 cr in 2018 and it is projected to reach Rs 47200 cr by 2024.

India and Norway agree to conduct marine spatial planning in oceanic space



The Union Ministry of Earth Science informed on March 3, 2021, that India and Norway have decided to work together in the area of Marine Spatial Planning for the next 5 years in the oceanic space.

According to the statement, the first meeting of the project steering committee was held in a virtual mode, after which both India and Norway charted out the plan for ensuring that the human activities at sea take place in a safe, efficient and sustainable manner in the areas like fisheries, transportation, energy, tourism, and aquaculture.

The Marine Spatial Planning is part of the Indo-Norway Integrated Ocean Initiative which was signed under MoU between the two nations in 2019. Puducherry and Lakshadweep have been identified as the pilot sites of the project.

Key Highlights:

- The Marine Spatial Planning- MSP initiative will be executed by the Earth Sciences ministry through NCCR- the National Centre for Coastal Research for India.
- Under the initiative, India and Norway have decided to extend support for the sustainable utilization of ocean resources to advance social and economic development in coastal areas.
- NCCR, in the primary phase, will develop a marine spatial planning framework for Lakshadweep and Puducherry.

- The sites have been chosen for the project in view of their setups with unique opportunities for the multiple sectors (like tourism, industries, and fisheries) to flourish.
- The initial investment of the Indian government for undertaking the planning and studies has been estimated to be around Rs. 8-10 crores.

Framework of MSP can be replicated to other coastal regions:

According to the release, the framework of marine spatial planning of these two environmentally critical areas (Lakshadweep and Puducherry) can be replicated in other coastal regions of the country as well.

Notably, the United Nations Environment Program and the World Bank have expressed interest in supporting the Earth Sciences Ministry in conducting marine spatial planning which is a societal-beneficial initiative for the coastal regions of India.

The initiative will be implemented by and the Norwegian Environment Agency and Earth Sciences Ministry through the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Norway.

NCCR had also earlier developed coastal management plans for the Gulf of Kachchh, Goa, Chennai, which proved to be very successful. Now the latest initiative will aid the development of multiple stakeholders and economic sectors in a greater number of coastal areas of India.

Blue Economy: Vision of New India

The Indian government's vision of New India by 2030 highlights the blue economy as one of the 10 major dimensions of growth. Marine Spatial Planning has been globally identified as a tool for integrated and sustainable ocean management. It is a noted area for work in the Blue Economic Policy of India being developed by MoES.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan inaugurates Centre for Advanced Radiation Shielding and Geopolymeric Materials

The Minister of Science & Technology, Earth Sciences Dr. Harsh Vardhan inaugurated the **Centre for Advanced Radiation Shielding and Geopolymeric Materials and Analytical High-Resolution Transmission Electron Microscope Laboratory** during his visit to CSIR-AMPRI in Bhopal on March 13, 2021.



The Union Minister also laid the foundation stone of the **CSIR-AMPRI Bamboo Composite Structure**. Speaking on the occasion, the Minister said that CSIR-AMPRI has been successfully adopting 'Waste to Wealth' strategy as the institute has developed radiation shielding materials utilizing industrial wastes as raw materials.

The institute has come up with a novel process for making lead-free and highly effective shielding materials from industrial waste namely red mud and fly ash. The shielding materials can be used for the **construction of X-ray diagnostic and CT scanner rooms**.

The Union Minister also mentioned that the institute is working in the cutting-edge areas of advanced technologies. It has taken the lead during COVID times by undertaking research in collaboration with AIIMS, Bhopal in the area of development of rapid electrochemical-based diagnostic for detection of SARS-COV infection.

Centre for Advanced Radiation Shielding and Geopolymeric Materials

The Centre for Advanced Radiation Shielding and Geopolymeric Materials will be set up on a total area measuring 455.52 Sq.m and Carpet Area of 906.24 Sq.m.

The advances in geopolymetric materials will help boost strategic applications such as development of:

-Thermal Resistant Geopolymeric Concrete for Missile and Rocket Launching

Pad

-Geopolymeric Bullet Proof Concrete for Bunkers

-Graphene-Induced Geopolymeric Concrete

-Geopolymeric Radiation Shielding Concrete

It will also have advanced conventional applications such as development and upscaling of ready mix Geopolymeric Concrete for road applications and structural applications and the development of Roller-Compacted Geopolymeric Concrete and development of pre-stressed Geopolymeric Concrete components.

Objective

- The centre is expected to help enhance the knowledge for understanding the mechanism of Radiation Shielding and improvement in engineering properties of developed materials.
- It will facilitate the upscaling of technologies in this area and provide technological support to the Indian industry.

Analytical High-Resolution Transmission Electron Microscope Laboratory

The Analytical High-Resolution Transmission Electron Microscope Laboratory houses Scanning Transmission Electron Microscope (STEM) with High-Angle Annular Dark Field Detector (HAADF) and Energy Dispersive Spectrometer (EDS) along with TEM sample preparation equipment such as Ion milling system, Ultrasonic disc cutter, Dimple grinder, Disk punch, lapping disk and Diamond saw.

This laboratory will be capable of performing microanalysis such as micro diffraction, rocking beam channelling patterns, qualitative and quantitative X-ray spectroscopy analysis, particle size analysis, dislocation density and movement, precipitation, nucleation and growth.

Significance

CSIR-AMPR Director Dr. Avnish Kumar Srivastava noted that these advanced instruments in CSIR-AMPRI could throw light on the morphological, structural and compositional analysis of advanced materials developed at CSIR-AMPRI.

This facility will not only enhance the research quality of CSIR-AMPRI but also enable neighbouring institutes of Madhya Pradesh to carry out innovative research on advanced materials and develop know-how technologies.

CSIR-AMPRI Bamboo Composite Structure

The CSIR-AMPRI has developed the **CSIR-AMPRI Bamboo Composite Structure**, knowhow of manufacturing environmentally friendly multifunctional bamboo composite material, for modern housing and structures using abundantly available bamboo as a raw material.

The newly developed bamboo-composite material will serve as a sustainable, competitive and environment-friendly alternative material, which will be useful for the construction of smart green buildings due to its aesthetic appearance, acoustic & thermal insulation.

Benefits

According to Dr. Harsh Vardhan, the CSIR-AMPRI Bamboo Composite Structure will be advantageous to the bamboo cultivators located in various parts of India. It will also help in the generation of employment.

The Union Minister observed that while India is the second-largest cultivator of bamboo, it has only a 4 percent share of world trade and the bamboo wood technology has the potential of increasing this trade share.

Jal Shakti Ministry announces 12 iconic sites for transforming them into Swachh Tourist Destinations

The Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS) under the Jal Shakti Ministry has announced the selection of **12 iconic sites** that will be transformed into 'Swachh Tourist Destinations' under Phase IV of Swachh Iconic Places (SIP) initiative of Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen (SBM-G).



The announcement takes forward Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for transforming iconic heritage, spiritual and cultural places in the country.

The project is being coordinated by the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation of Jal Shakti Ministry in association with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture and the concerned State/UT governments.

Objective

The initiative aims to enhance the experience of both domestic and foreign visitors to the iconic sites by improving the sanitation and cleanliness standards at and around the sites.

The Swachh Iconic Places initiative aims to achieve a distinctly higher level of sanitation and cleanliness at the selected sites, especially on the peripheries and in approach areas.

Following are the 12 iconic sites that have been selected under SIP Phase IV:

S.no	Iconic Site	State
1.	Ajanta Caves	Maharashtra

2.	Sanchi Stupa	Madhya Pradesh
3.	Kumbhalgarh Fort	Rajasthan
4.	Jaisalmer Fort	Rajasthan
5.	Ramdevra	Jaisalmer, Rajasthan
6.	Golconda Fort	Hyderabad, Telangana
7.	Sun Temple	Konark, Odisha
8.	Rock Garden	Chandigarh
9.	Dal Lake	Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir
10.	Banke Bihari Temple	Mathura, Uttar Pradesh
11.	Agra Fort	Agra, Uttar Pradesh
12.	Kalighat Temple	West Bengal

Swachh Iconic Places (SIP) initiative

- The Swachh Iconic Places initiative is focused on cleaning up 100 places across India that are “iconic” due to their heritage, religious or cultural significance.
- The Initiative aims to improve the cleanliness conditions at these places to a distinctly higher level and is being undertaken in partnership with Ministries of Urban Development, Tourism and Culture with MDWS being the nodal ministry.
- All the iconic sites have designated PSUs for financial and technical support.

Sites selected under Phase I of SIP initiative:

1. Mata Vaishno Devi, Jammu and Kashmir
2. Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, Maharashtra
3. Taj Mahal, Uttar Pradesh
4. Tirupati Temple, Andhra Pradesh
5. Golden Temple, Punjab
6. Manikarnika Ghat, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
7. Ajmer Sharif Dargah, Rajasthan
8. Meenakshi Temple, Tamil Nadu
9. Kamakhya Temple, Assam
- Jagannath Puri, Odisha

Sites selected under Phase II of SIP initiative:

1. Gangotri, Uttarakhand
2. Yamunotri, Uttarakhand
3. Mahakaleshwar Temple, Ujjain
4. Char Minar, Hyderabad
5. Church and Convent of St. Francis of Assisi, Goa
6. Adi Shankaracharya's abode Kaladi in Ernakulam
7. Gomateshwar in Shravanbelgola
8. Baijnath Dham, Devghar
9. Gaya Tirth in Bihar
10. Somnath temple in Gujarat.

Sites selected under Phase III of SIP initiative:

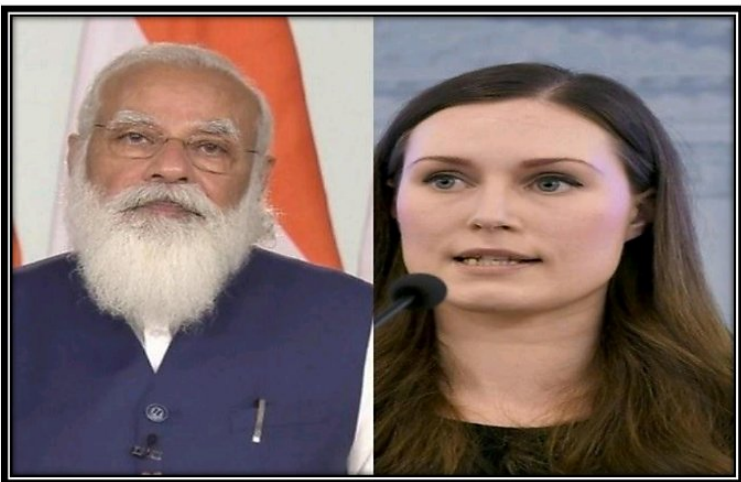
1. Raghavendra Swamy Temple: Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh
2. Hazarduari Palace: Murshidabad, West Bengal
3. Brahma Sarovar Temple: Kurukshetra, Haryana
4. VidurKuti: Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh
5. Mana village: Chamoli, Uttarakhand
6. Pangong Lake: Leh-Ladakh, J&K
7. Nagvasuki Temple: Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh
8. ImaKeithal/market: Imphal, Manipur

9. Sabarimala Temple: Kerala

10. Kanvashram: Uttarakhand

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International

Prime Minister Modi holds virtual summit with Finland counterpart Sanna Marin

PM Modi on March 16, 2021, held a summit in a virtual mode with the Prime Minister of Finland Sanna Marin.

During the summit, both the leaders covered the entire spectrum of the bilateral relationship between India and Finland. They also exchanged views on global and regional issues of mutual interest.

According to Prime Minister's Office, the summit will provide a blueprint for the diversification and future expansion of the Partnership between India and Finland.

The official release added that both the countries enjoy warm and friendly relations with each other that are solely based on the shared values of freedom, democracy, and rules-based international order.

Prime Minister Modi while speaking at the summit highlighted that in 2020, India sent medicines as well as other essentials to more than 150 countries amid the pandemic. And in recent weeks, as India worked on its vaccine development capacity, about 70 countries all over the world have received more than 58 million doses of made in India vaccines.

India invites Finland to join ISA

Prime Minister Modi during the summit also urged Finland to join the International Solar Alliance- ISA and CDRI. He further added that these international institutions will be extremely from Finland's advanced expertise and research.

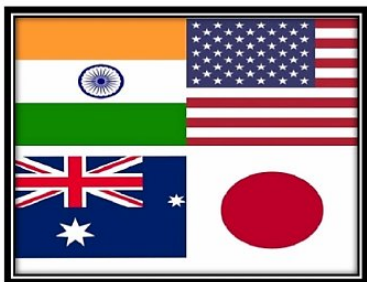
Finland recognizes India's efforts to combat COVID-19

During the virtual summit between India and Finland, the Prime Minister of Finland Sanna Marin highlighted that the top item on the agenda of all the heads of the governments is the Coronavirus pandemic. She further added that Finland recognizes the efforts made by India in an extensive vaccination program to combat the pandemic.

India-Finland collaboration:

- India and Finland have very close cooperation in the area of education, trade and investment, science and technology, innovation as well as research and development.
- Both countries also have an ongoing collaboration in the joint development of a Quantum computer with the use of Artificial Intelligence for addressing societal challenges.
- Around 100 Finnish companies have been actively operating in India in different sectors such as elevators, telecom, machinery, and energy including renewable energy.
- Around 30 companies of India have also been active in Finland and their work is mainly in auto-components, IT, and the hospitality sector.

Quad will remain an important pillar of stability in the indo-pacific region: PM Modi at Quad leaders' summit



The first-ever summit of the leaders of QUAD took place in a virtual mode on March 12, 2021. PM Modi participated in the discussion between the leaders. The summit also witnessed the participation of the Prime Minister of Japan Yoshihide Suga, President of the United States Joe Biden, and Prime Minister of Australia Scott Morrison.

As per the statement by the External Affairs Ministry, the Quad leaders will be discussing the ongoing efforts to combat the pandemic. They will also explore the opportunities for collaboration in ensuring equitable, safe as well as affordable vaccines in the Indo-Pacific region.

Quad is the force for global good: PM Modi

Prime Minister Modi while addressing the first summit of Quad leaders mentioned that today's agenda of the Quad leaders covering areas such as climate change, vaccine, and emerging technologies make Quad a force for global good.

While highlighting the significance of Quad in today's world, PM Modi stated that Quad has come of age and will remain an important pillar of stability in the indo-pacific region.

Promoting stable, secular, and prosperous indo-pacific:

PM Modi noted that he sees the positive vision of Quad as an extension of India's ancient philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' which regards the world as one family. He further added that the leaders of Quad will work together as closely as ever before to advance shared values as well as promote stable, secular, and prosperous indo-pacific.

Indo-Pacific to shape the destiny of the world: Australian PM

During his address at the virtual summit of Quad, the Prime Minister of Australia highlighted that Indo-Pacific will now shape the destiny of the world in the 21st century. He further added that as the four leaders of great democracies in the indo-pacific region, let this partnership be an enabler of stability, peace, and prosperity.

US committed to achieving stability in the region: US President

The President of the United States Joe Biden assured that the country is committed to be working with the Quad leaders and with other allies in the region to achieve stability. The President further added that this group is particularly significant as it is dedicated to concrete results and practical solutions.

The US President during the summit also informed that the country will be launching a new joint ambitious partnership that will boost the vaccine manufacturing for the global benefit and will strengthen vaccinations to benefit the entire indo-Pacific.

Regional and global issues on agenda: Quad summit

During the virtual summit of the Quad- Quadrilateral Security Summit on March 12, the leaders of the powerful economies will discuss the global and regional issues of mutual interest. They will also talk about the practical areas of cooperation for maintaining an open, free, and inclusive Indo-pacific region.

The summit in a virtual mode will provide an opportunity to exchange views and ideas on contemporary challenges such as emerging and critical technologies, resilient supply chains, climate change, and maritime security.

India's interaction with Japan and the US ahead of the summit:

Ahead of the Quad summit, **PM Modi and the Prime Minister of Japan** held a telephonic conversation which lasted for 40 minutes.

According to the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Japan, the two leaders had shared the recognition that the cooperation to realize a free and open Indo-Pacific has become increasingly important. They also shared the view of steadily advancing both

India-Japan bilateral relations as well as India-Japan-US-Australia quadrilateral cooperation.

The President of the United States Joe Biden had also spoken to PM Modi in February 2021 for which the White House stated that the leaders will work towards a stronger regional architecture through the quad.

Virtual meeting of the foreign ministers of quad:

In February 2021, the Foreign Ministers of the four quad countries held an online meeting in which they agreed to work toward a free and open Indo-Pacific region while also strongly opposing any form of attempts by China to alter the status quo in East and South China Seas by force.

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

Quad is an informal strategic forum between India, Japan, Australia, and the United States. The forum is maintained by the information exchanges, semi-regular summits, and military drills between member countries. The forum was initiated as a dialogue in August 2007 by the then PM of Japan Shinzo Abe with the support of leaders of India, the US, and Australia.

France, Germany, Spain & Italy temporarily halt rollout of AstraZeneca's COVID-1

France, Germany, Spain and Italy have become the latest European nations to temporarily halt the use of the Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine over blood clot concerns on March 15, 2021.

The move comes after other European nations- Denmark, Norway and Iceland temporarily suspended the use of AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine on March 11, 2021 due to concerns about patients developing blood clots post the vaccine jab.

The move was undertaken despite AstraZeneca and Europe's medicines watchdog insistence that the **vaccine was safe**.

Key Details

- Spain's Health Minister Carolina Darias said that the nation will stop the vaccine rollout for two weeks. Darias said in a nationalised televised address that it was a **temporary precautionary suspension** till the risks are evaluated by the European Medicines Agency (EMA).
- German health minister Jens Spahn also announced on March 15 that the country would pause vaccinations as a precaution.
- France and Italy also temporarily suspended their rollout of the AstraZeneca vaccine, pending review by the EU's medicines regulator, the EMA.
- French President Emmanuel Macron said that the nation has decided to suspend the use of AstraZeneca's vaccine as a **precautionary measure and is hoping to resume it quickly** if the EMA's allows it.
- The suspensions come as the third wave of coronavirus infections loom over the continent.

WHO, EMA, AstraZeneca defend the COVID-19 vaccine

- The temporary suspensions have been announced despite EU's medicines regulator reiterating that the countries should continue their AstraZeneca vaccine rollout.
- The World Health Organisation, the EMA and AstraZeneca have repeatedly stated that there is no evidence of a link between the vaccine and blood clotting and that the rollouts should continue while the reports are being investigated.
- The WHO said in a statement that as of now, there is no evidence that the incidents are caused by the vaccine and it is important that vaccination campaigns continue so that we can save lives and stem severe disease from the virus.
- The European Medicines Agency also asked countries to continue their vaccine rollouts, stating that the benefits of the vaccinations outweigh potential risks.

Background

Austria had suspended the use of a batch of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine on March 8, 2021 after a nurse died of "severe blood coagulation problems" days after receiving the vaccine.

Following this many countries including Denmark, Norway, Iceland, the Netherlands, Thailand, Ireland temporarily suspended the use of AstraZeneca's vaccine over fears of side effects like blood clots after vaccination.

The United Kingdom, in the meanwhile, is continuing with its rollout and over 11 million have been vaccinated in the nation with the AstraZeneca vaccine.

Denmark, Norway, Iceland temporarily halt use of AstraZeneca COVID Vaccine; UK calls it safe & effective

Denmark, Norway and Iceland temporarily suspended the use of AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine on March 11, 2021 due to concerns about patients developing blood clots post the vaccine jab, despite AstraZeneca and Europe's medicines watchdog insisting that the vaccine was safe.

The move comes after reports of blood clots among people who were administered the first dose of AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine. The Danish health authority, however, stressed that the **move was precautionary** and that *"it has not been determined, at the time being, that there is a link between the vaccine and the blood clots"*.

The Danish health authority director Soren Brostrom said in the statement, *"It is important to point out that we have not terminated the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine, we are just pausing its use."*

Brostrom added saying that there is broad documentation proving that the vaccine is both safe and efficient. *"But both we and the Danish Medicines Agency must act on information about possible serious side effects, both in Denmark and in other European countries,"* Brostrom said.

Here is how this started

Austria suspended the use of a batch of AstraZeneca vaccines on March 8, 2021 after a 49-year-old nurse died of "severe blood coagulation problems" days after receiving the vaccine.

Following this, four other European

countries, **Lithuania, Luxemburg, Latvia and Estonia** also suspended the use of Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines from the batch. The batch, comprising one million jabs, was sent to 17 European countries.

Denmark, however, **suspended the use of all of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine supply**. Iceland and Norway followed suit citing similar concerns. The Director of infection prevention and control at the National Institute of Health of Norway, Geir Bukholm, also said that they are pausing the AstraZeneca vaccination in Norway till they get more information to see if there is a link between the vaccine and the blood clot case.

Impact

The suspension will be reviewed after two weeks. It will definitely slow down Denmark's vaccination campaign. Denmark now expects to have its entire adult population vaccinated by mid-August instead of early July.

Thailand becomes first Asian country to halt use of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine

Thailand has temporarily halted the use of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine for its vaccination programme, saying that it is waiting for the results of investigations into potential side effects.

Safety of Vaccine has been extensively studied: AstraZeneca

AstraZeneca, the Anglo-Swedish company which developed the COVID-19 vaccine with Oxford University, **defended the safety of its product** saying that the **safety of the vaccine has been extensively studied** in phase III clinical trials and peer-reviewed data confirms the **vaccine has been generally well tolerated**.

UK defends AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine, calls it 'safe and effective'

- The United Kingdom on March 11, 2021 defended the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine after Denmark temporarily suspended its use. The United Kingdom insisted that the vaccine is both safe and effective and said that it will continue with its own rollout of the vaccine.
- UK PM Boris Johnson's official spokesman said that the results of the vaccine programme are visible in terms of lower number of COVID-19 cases, lower number of deaths and hospitalisations.
- Europe's medicines watchdog, European Medicines Agency (EMA) also insisted that AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine is safe. In fact, it said that a preliminary probe showed that the batch of AstraZeneca vaccines used in Austria was likely not to blame for the nurse's death.
- The EMA also shared that only 22 cases of blood clots were reported among more than three million people vaccinated in the European Economic Area as of March 9, 2021.

Background

The United Kingdom had begun the world's first mass vaccination drive against the coronavirus in December 2020 by granting emergency use authorisation to the Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine and the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

Denmark had last year killed its entire population of Mink based on rumours of coronavirus getting transmitted to humans through minks. The rumours, however, had turned out to be false.

Russia, China sign MoU on lunar research station

Roscosmos Space Agency of Russia has informed that China and Russia signed a Memorandum of Understanding on March 9, 2021, to set up an international lunar research station.

The MoU between the two nations was signed by the head of the China National Space Administration Zhang Kejian and Chief of Roscosmos Dmitry Rogozin during a meeting via video conference.

Russia's space agency further mentioned that Beijing and Moscow will draw a roadmap for establishing the station and will cooperate closely on designing, planning, and implementing the project as well as presenting it to the global space community.

International Lunar Research Station

The International lunar science station will be a complex of research and experimental facilities which will be created on the surface or in orbit of the moon. The complex will be designed to conduct multipurpose and multidisciplinary research work.

Both China and Russia will also promote international cooperation on the project. They will offer equal access to any nation that wants to take part in the project.

China and Russia's collaboration in the lunar space station:

For the latest joint project in space, both countries will adhere to the principle of co-consultation, shared benefits, and joint construction.

China and Russia will facilitate extensive cooperation in the International Lunar Research Station, it will be open to all the interested countries which will further strengthen scientific research exchanges. The project will promote humanity's exploration and the use of outer space for peaceful purposes.

Deepening relations of Russia and China:

Russia and China have sought to deepen their relations in recent years, particularly since 2014 when Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine had badly strained its relations with the west.

In the early years of its space program, China drew heavily on Russian expertise but has largely formed its own path since the launching of its first crewed mission in 2003.

PM Modi speaks to Japanese counterpart Suga Yoshihide, exchanges views on regional and global issues

PM Modi and Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide on March 9, 2021, exchanged views on the global and regional issues of mutual interest.

The leaders also concurred that the partnership between the two countries can play a significant role in addressing common challenges.

The Prime Ministers during a telephonic conversation emphasized that their engagement with like-minded nations such as the US and Australia in a form of QUAD consultations hold value and the discussions must continue.

Growing bilateral relations between India and Japan:

- During the telephonic conversation, both the leaders showed satisfaction at the positive momentum in the India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership in the last few years and that it has been guided by shared values and mutual trust.
- PM Modi noted the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail project as a shining example of the bilateral strategic partnership between the two countries. He also expressed his commitment to its successful implementation.
- The two leaders talked about the recent signing of MoU on the Specified Skilled Workers and that they look forward to its early implementation.
- Prime Minister Modi and Japanese PM Suga Yoshihide also appreciated that the bilateral talks were maintained over the last year despite the pandemic.

Celebration of diplomatic relations between India and Japan:

- Prime Minister Modi and the Japanese Prime Minister while discussing various bilateral issues also noted that the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Japan will fall in 2022.

Both the leaders agreed that this event will be celebrated in a befitting manner. PM Modi also invited Suga Yoshihide to visit India at the earliest for the annual bilateral summit.

Switzerland votes to ban full face coverings in public places



Switzerland on March 7, 2021 narrowly voted in favour of a proposal banning full facial coverings including the burqa and niqab in almost all public places. In the public referendum, around 51.21 percent of voters voted in support of the controversial proposal.

The vote means that full facial covering will be banned in all publicly accessible places in Switzerland including on the streets, public transport, in public offices such as restaurants, shops and in the countryside.

Where will full-face covering be allowed?

The full-face covering will be allowed in places of worship and other sacred sites. It will also be allowed for health and safety reasons and in situations where it is a local custom such as carnivals.

Key Highlights

- According to the proposal by the Swiss Federal Government, there will be no additional exceptions such as for tourists.
- The proposal to ban full-face coverings in public places was put forward by several groups including the right-wing Swiss People's Party.
- The proposal does not mention Islam specifically but has been widely referred to as the "burqa ban" in the media.
- The proposal was widely criticised by the Swiss Federal Government, the Swiss religious organizations and human rights and civic groups.

Response to the Ban

The Swiss Council of Religions, which represents all major religious communities in Switzerland, stated that the human right to religious freedom also protects religious practices such as dress codes.

The Swiss Federal Council, which serves as the country's federal government along with the Swiss Parliament also rejected the initiative and advised people to vote against it.

Background

The referendum to ban full-face coverings in Switzerland came after years of debates. Another referendum 12 years ago outlawed the construction of minarets in Switzerland.

France was the first European nation to ban burqas and niqabs in public places in 2011. The European Court of Human Rights had upheld the ban in 2014.

Several other nations in Europe now have bans, partial bans or local bans on face coverings including Germany, Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands.

The United Nations Human Rights Committee stated in 2018 that the bans violate the human rights of Muslim women and risk "confining them to their homes."

Climate change priority for both India and Sweden: PM Modi at virtual summit with Swedish counterpart

PM Modi held a virtual summit with the Prime Minister of Sweden Stefan Lofven on March 5, 2021. Both the leaders exchanged views on the global and regional issues and also discussed bilateral relations between the two nations.

According to a statement by the Ministry of External Affairs, this was the 5th interaction between the two leaders since 2015. Prime Minister Modi had visited Stockholm for the First India Nordic Summit in



April 2018. While the Prime Minister of Sweden had visited India for the special Make in India week in February 2016.

The Ministry further mentioned that in September 2015, the leaders of India and Sweden had met on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly. In April 2020, they had a telephonic conversation to discuss the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

PM Modi expresses solidarity with Sweden over violent attack

Prime Minister Modi during the virtual summit with the Prime Minister of Sweden expressed solidarity with the people of Sweden, over a violent attack that took place in Sweden on March 3. He added that India hopes that the injured will recover soon. As many as 8 people were injured in a knife attack in Southern Sweden.

India committed to supplying COVID-19 vaccines globally:

PM Modi while addressing the summit informed that India has so far provided 'Made in India' vaccines to around 50 countries and is further committed to supplying the vaccines to even more countries in the days to come.

Climate change priority for both India and Sweden:

PM Modi during the summit stated that 'cooperation', 'coordination' and 'collaboration' have become more important in the present scenario between the like-minded countries. Human rights, the shared value of democracy, equality, rule of law, justice will strengthen our relations and mutual cooperation.

Prime Minister also added that the important issue of climate change is a priority for both India and Sweden and the Indian government will like to work with Sweden on this. He further invited the Swedish government to strengthen ties in technology, innovation, start-ups, investment, and research.

Relations between India-Sweden:

Both the countries have warm and friendly relations based on the shared values of freedom, democracy, rules-based international order, and pluralism.

India and Sweden also share close cooperation in the areas of innovation, trade, and investment, research and development, and science and technology.

Around 250 Swedish companies have been actively operating in India in various sectors such as the auto industry, health, and life sciences, defence, clean technology, heavy machinery, and equipment. Around 75 Indian companies have been active in Sweden.

Italy blocks shipment of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine to Australia, Know why here!



Italy has blocked a shipment of 250,000 doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine that was bound for Australia. This comes amid AstraZeneca's failure to deliver the promised doses to the European Union.

This is the first time a European Union state has blocked the export of the COVID-19 vaccine amid a global shortfall. The action risks triggering a global

backlash against the European Union.

The move underscores the growing frustration within the 27-nation EU bloc regarding the slow rollout of its vaccine drive and the shortfall of promised vaccine deliveries, especially by AstraZeneca.

EU approves the blockage?

Under the European Union's export transparency mechanism, countries have to inform the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, of their decisions to block or allow exports of vaccines outside the bloc.

The European Commission reportedly did not oppose Italy's decision or raise objections to the move. The move comes after Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi, who came to power on February 13, called for a tougher approach against companies that don't respect their delivery commitments during an EU summit last week.

Why has Italy blocked Australia's vaccines?

The Italian foreign ministry reportedly stated that the decision to block the shipment of 250,700 doses of AstraZeneca's vaccine to Australia was taken as a consequence of **continued vaccine scarcity in Europe and Italy** and delay in the supply of vaccines by AstraZeneca. The Ministry also stated that it did not consider Australia as a vulnerable country.

EU's export control system

- This is the first use of an export control system instituted by the bloc to make sure big pharma companies respect their contracts.
- The EU had issued an export control system for COVID-19 vaccines in late January forcing companies to respect their contractual obligations to the bloc before commercial exports can be approved.
- This was after the bloc faced shortages of doses during the early stages of the vaccine campaign that started in late December.
- The European Union was specifically disappointed with AstraZeneca because it is delivering far fewer doses to the bloc than it had promised.
- Out of the initial order for 80 million doses to the EU in the first quarter, the company will be struggling to deliver just half that quantity. AstraZeneca's CEO Pascal Soriot blamed the shortfall on technical production issues.

Australia's response

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on March 5 that the nation had anticipated veto problems could arise in shipments from Europe.

Will this impact Australia's COVID-19 vaccination drive?

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison assured that **Australia's vaccination schedule will continue as planned**. He said, "They are in an unbridled crisis. That is not the situation in Australia."

He added saying that Australia has been able to secure vaccine supplies and even additional supplies for importation, both with Pfizer and AstraZeneca, which means that they can continue the rollout of their program.

He stated that Australia is also producing vaccines domestically, giving it sovereignty over its vaccination program.

Background

The European Union has vaccinated only 8 percent of its population in comparison to over 30 percent in the United Kingdom. Australia is currently very much at the start of its vaccination drive.

With a population of 450 million people, the bloc had signed deals for six different vaccine manufacturers and ordered a total of 400 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine and sealed agreements with other companies for more than 2 billion shots.

However, despite current shortages and delays, the bloc is still convinced that it can vaccinate 70 percent of the adult population by the end of summer.

India at UNSC calls for probe into use of chemical weapons in Syria



India at the United Nations Security Council on March 4, 2021, has called for an objective investigation into the alleged use of chemical weapons.

The country also urged the UNSC to remain cognizant of the dangers of mass weapons destruction falling into the hands of the terrorist organisations.

India's Deputy Permanent Representative-Political Coordinator to the UN R Ravindra, while speaking at the UNSC mentioned that the activities of the terrorists, especially ISIS, have increased in Syria and, hence, the council must remain apprised of the dangers of the weapons of mass destruction.

India at UNSC also urged the other countries not to link the humanitarian and development assistance with politics.

India emphasizes impartial investigation in Syria:

While reiterating India's emphasis on the demand for an objective and impartial investigation into the alleged use of any chemical weapons in Syria, R Ravindra called on the council to remain alert of the dangers of weapons of mass destruction falling in the hands of terrorist groups.

He further added that terrorist activities, especially ISIS, have increased in the region. India has called for a peaceful and comprehensive resolution of the Syrian conflict through a Syrian-led dialogue by also taking into consideration the aspirations of the Syrian people.

India supports the return of normalcy and rebuilding of Syria:

Deputy Permanent Representative-Political Coordinator to the UN also pointed out that India has contributed to the rebuilding and return of normalcy of Syria through human resource development and humanitarian assistance.

The Indian government has provided USD 1 million to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Trust Fund for the activities related to the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria.

The coordination between Syria and OPCW Technical Secretariat is extremely critical for the early resolution of all the outstanding issues. India at UNSC hoped that the consultations between the Syrian authorities and Declaration Assessment Team will help in assessing the consistencies and reported gaps.

US Government includes Myanmar ministries, army conglomerates to trade blacklist

The Commerce Department of the United States has decided to include the Myanmar Home Affairs Ministry, Defence Ministry, and the conglomerates' companies MEHL- Myanmar Economic Holdings Public Company and MEC- Myanmar Economic Cooperation into its trade blacklist.

The Bureau of Industry and Security of US has also added to the Entity list four entities- two Burmese security services and military entities and two commercial entities that are operated and owned by one of those entities.

The decision has been taken in the light of pro-democracy protests in Myanmar as they continue to intensify despite the crackdown by Junta. The military also fired upon the pro-democracy protestors, killing 38 people.

The protests in Myanmar have been taking place because of the recent military coup which overthrew the democratically elected government.

Why the ministries have been added to the trade blacklist?

In the trade blacklist, the US has included two conglomerates MEC and MEHL of Myanmar which is used by the Military to control vast swathes of the country's economy.

While the Home Ministry of Myanmar has been included as it commands the police and has also purchased technology from the US that was being used for the surveillance of social media.

According to the statement by the Commerce Department of the US, the country will not allow the Burmese military to continue to benefit from access to the items subjected to the EAR and that the Commerce Department has been reviewing more additional measures as warranted by the military's actions.

Incidents in Myanmar, not an internal affair: UN

While condemning the firing upon the protestors on March 3, 2021, the UN Special Envoy for Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener stated that it was the bloodiest day since the coup happened on February 1 in Myanmar. She added that now more than 50 people have died since the coup started.

Schraner further said that the incidents taking place in Myanmar are not an internal affair as they have been affecting the stability of the region. The UN also assured that they have suspended the dialogue with Tatmadaw (Myanmar military).

The UN Human Rights Office has informed that the security forces have begun a violent crackdown on the protestors in the towns and cities across Myanmar.

Myanmar military continues violence despite international pressure:

Despite the increasing global pressure, the Burmese military has continued to violently suppress the protests against the unlawful takeover of the country. On February 27, the Myanmar military had fired the UN Ambassador of the country after he appealed to UNGA for international help to overturn the military coup.

Several lawmakers have also designated the Myanmar military as a terrorist organization.

Moreover, the outcasted civilian leader of Myanmar, Kyi, who was detained after the coup stated that two more charges have been added against her since the coup.

Background:

The military coup took place in Myanmar which detained the democratically elected leaders of the country on February 1, 2021, halted its tentative steps towards democracy after nearly 50 years of military rule. The coup has drawn sanctions and condemnation from the US and other western countries as well as growing concerns among its neighbours.

UNGA adopts India-sponsored resolution, declares 2023 as International Year of Millets



The 193 member United Nations General Assembly- UNGA has declared 2023 as the International Year of Millets. The India-sponsored resolution has been adopted by consensus and is supported by over 70 nations.

TS Tirumurti, India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador shared the news via Twitter and added that it is a big step to promote ecological and nutritional benefits of millets globally as a key component of the food basket and effective policy change.

He also expressed gratitude to all the co-sponsors of the resolution, especially Nepal, Bangladesh, Kenya, Senegal, Russia and Nigeria, and all the other member states of the UN.

The unanimously adopted resolution which was initiated by India was co-sponsored by over 70 countries. India's Permanent Mission to the United Nations also distributed 'murukku', millet snack, to all the UN member states.

International Year of Millets: What is the Objective?

The resolution declaring 2023 as the International Year of Millets invites the UN, all the member states, and other global organisations to observe the year through activities that aim at raising awareness as well as directing policy attention to the health and nutritional benefits of millets.

The activities must also highlight the suitability of millets for cultivation under the changing and adverse climatic conditions while directing attention to improve value chain efficiencies.

The resolution also considers the need to advocate balanced, diversified, and healthy diets through the increased consumption and sustainable production of millets. It recognizes the vast genetic diversity of millets as well as their adaptive nature to a range of productive environments.

UN Decade of Action on Nutrition:

The UN General Assembly, in April 2016, had proclaimed the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition from the year 2016 to 2025. It recognizes the need to eradicate hunger as well as also prevent all forms of malnutrition globally.

The UN Decade of Action on Nutrition provides an umbrella to a wide group of actors for working together to address nutrition issues.

Recalling this, the resolution on an International year of Millets underscores the need of promoting sustainable food systems that will foster balanced, diversified, and healthy diets including a variety of foods.

The resolution also invites the FAO- Food and Agriculture Organisation to facilitate the implementation of the International Year.

US lawmaker introduces bill to sanction Saudi Crown Prince for Jamal Khashoggi's murder



US lawmaker Ilhan Omar introduced a bill on March 2, 2021 to sanction **Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman** for his involvement in the **murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi**. This comes after a US intelligence report implicated the Saudi Crown for approving the operation to capture or kill Khashoggi.

Ilhan Omar, a Democrat from Minnesota said in a statement that this is a test of our humanity. She urged that if the United States of America truly supports freedom of expression, democracy and human rights, there is no reason not to sanction Mohammed bin Salman, a man that our own intelligence found to have approved the murder of US resident and Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Omar quoted Khashoggi's fiancée Hatice Cengiz in her statement: "If the Crown Prince is not punished, it will forever signal that the main culprit can get away with murder."

Ilhan Omar further tweeted saying that every minute Mohammed bin Salman escapes punishment is a moment where US interests, human rights, and the lives of Saudi dissenters are at risk.

Another Democrat lawmaker **Tom Malinowski** also put forward a bill that called for the Saudi Arabia Accountability for Gross Violations of Human Rights Act. The bill seeks to ensure that the Crown Prince is banned from travelling to the US. Malinowski added that not sanctioning the Saudi Crown Prince weakens the administration's stance.

US working to "recalibrate" not "rupture" US-Saudi relationship

- Though the United States had imposed sanctions on those involved in Khashoggi's killing, the Saudi Crown Prince was spared to preserve relations with the Gulf kingdom.
- However, US President Joe Biden tried to make clear that killings of political opponents were not acceptable to the United States.
- The US State Department spokesman Ned Price had stated that the US is working to "recalibrate" and not "rupture" the US-Saudi relationship.
- Saudi Arabia is an important ally for the US in the middle-east and its role is extremely significant, especially with the rising US tensions with Iran.

Background

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) had released a declassified report on February 26, 2021 that blamed the Saudi Crown Prince for planning the 2018 operation that killed Khashoggi, who was a Saudi citizen and resident of the US, in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey.

Jamal Khashoggi was a vocal critic of the Saudi regime. He was killed on October 2, 2018, in Turkey where he had gone to get some paperwork from the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul. His killing had led to global outrage and impacted the reputation of Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Salman.

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States

Arunachal Pradesh government to develop three model villages in Indo-Tibet China border areas



The Government of Arunachal Pradesh has decided to develop three model villages along the Indo-Tibet border area as a pilot project with an allocation of Rs. 30 crores. The move aims at boosting the development of the border areas.

The Deputy Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh Chowna Mein while presenting the Budget 2021-2022 in the state assembly on March 3, 2021, informed that the 3 villages will be developed initially in the Eastern, Western, and the Central part of the state along with the international border.

The model villages by the state government will serve as pilot projects which will further be expanded to cover many more such villages. The scheme will also include innovative ways to fit in the social-economic-cultural needs of the village life while establishing the model villages.

Development of the border villages in Arunachal Pradesh:

The Deputy CM of the state mentioned that the development of the border villages will remain a significant priority of the state government. He added that under the leadership of PM Modi, the last few years have witnessed an unprecedented focus on the development of border area infrastructure, especially road connectivity.

He assured that the state government will continue to work for the comprehensive development of the border villages by providing them with power, good road connectivity, health, water supply, and education.

Border Village illumination programme:

The Deputy CM proposed to launch Border Village Illumination programme by establishing the small and micro hydel in the remote border areas which can be used in the off-grid or local grid mode.

He also proposed to allocate initial money of Rs. 40 crores to this project which the state government will implement by converging the resources from the Central government.

The state government has proposed to allocate Rs. 5 crores for the repairing of foot suspension bridges in the border areas that are generally used by the border guarding forces for the purpose of patrolling.

The Deputy CM assured that these villages will be built in a way that the people of Arunachal Pradesh will feel proud of them. The state government will rope in border guarding forces in designing and implementing the scheme.

Jammu & Kashmir government approves Rs. 2 lakh interest-free loan for PMAY-U beneficiaries

The Jammu & Kashmir Administrative Council under the leadership of Lt. Governor Manoj Sinha has given approval to the proposal of the Housing and Urban Development Department.

The proposal called for providing interest-free loans up to Rs. 2 lakh to the urban houseless economically weaker section beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana- Urban's Beneficiary Led Construction- BLC component.

The time period of the interest-free loan has been fixed at 10 years. It includes a moratorium of six months and is repayable through a monthly installment of Rs. 2,500.



Key Highlights:

- The interest-free loan by the government will be an additional benefit which will be over and above the financial assistance of Rs. 1.66 lakh which has already been provided to the beneficiaries under the PMAY-U.
- With this step, the beneficiaries of the scheme will now be able to avail of Rs. 3.66 lakh for the construction of their dwelling units.
- At present, the government scheme will be benefitting 41,992 beneficiaries under the BLC component.
- The decision is part of the central government's aim of providing affordable housing to the economically weaker section of the society.

Why an interest-free loan is required?

The beneficiaries under the BLC component of the Yojana have been experiencing difficulty in mobilizing their contribution as they come from the economically weaker sections and also have to contribute higher shares as compared to other states and UTs.

Because of this, the construction of the dwelling units of this component of PMAY-U is not able to achieve the desired target.

The beneficiaries of the BLC component demanded the enhancement of assistance in their favor so that they are able to complete their houses within the targeted date of the mission. Because of the difficulties faced by the beneficiaries in arranging the financial resources, the state government agreed to provide interest subsidies to all the eligible beneficiaries.

Uttar Pradesh government to launch Arjuna Sahayak irrigation Project

The Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adityanath informed on March 10, 2021, that Arjuna Sahayak Irrigation Project worth Rs. 2,600 crores will bring positive changes in the lives of the farmers of Hamirpur, Mahoba, and Banda in the Bundelkhand region which was denied to them by the previous governments.

The Chief Minister further informed that the project will be completed in the next one or two months and will be inaugurated by PM Modi. He was addressing the gathering after making an inspection of the Lahchura Dam of Arjuna Sahayak Project in Mahoba.

While talking about the Mahoba district in Bundelkhand, the Chief Minister mentioned that he enjoys a special affection for the district. He said that many of the features in Mahoba connects us to the historical and spiritual traditions.

Significance of Arjuna Sahayak Irrigation Project:

- The project by the Uttar Pradesh government on the river Dhasan will be able to provide irrigation facilities to 1.5 lakh farmers of 168 villages of Banda, Mahoba, and Hamirpur.
- Around 4 lakh people will get pure drinking water and the irrigation facilities will be provided under the project in the area of 15,000 hectares.
- Under Arjuna Sahayak Irrigation Project, the irrigation capacity will be expanded up to 44382 hectares in the region.

Drinking water schemes in UP:

While explaining the details of the drinking water schemes, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh mentioned that half of the diseases will be eliminated automatically by drinking pure water.

Under Jal Jeevan Mission, for Bundelkhand, the government has been delivering water from tap to every household. The Chief Minister has also directed the officials to formulate an action plan to train the local youth under the Jal Jeevan Mission.

While talking about the development in Bundelkhand, the CM assured that the projects such as Defence Corridors, Expressways, and Jal Jeevan Mission will take the region to new heights.

UP government orders removal of all roadside religious structures



The Uttar Pradesh government on March 11, 2021 ordered the **removal of all religious structures on public roads**. The official press release from the Home Department stated that no structure or construction of religious nature should be allowed on public roads, streets, pavements and by the roadside.

The statement further read that if any such structure construction has come up on or after January 1, 2011, it should be removed immediately.' These instructions have been issued by the state government in compliance with the order of the high court.

Key Highlights

- The home department has directed the district magistrates (DMs) and Mandalayukta of all the districts to remove all the religious places that encroach the roads.
- All senior administrative and police officials at the district level have been informed that if any such religious construction or encroachment has been done on public roads or pavements including highways on or after before January 1, 2011, then they should be shifted to the land offered by the followers of that religion or private land proposed by the people responsible for its management within six months or will be removed.
- The order states that the concerned officials will be personally held responsible for any deviation or disobedience of these instructions.
- Further, the disobedience of these orders will be taken up as a deliberate contempt of orders of the high court, which will be considered as criminal contempt.

- All district magistrates have been asked to submit a report by March 14 updating the status on the number of religious places removed after the order.

Background

The Supreme Court of India in April 2016 had come down heavily on the states for not removing encroachments in public places like illegal religious structures. The court had stated that the unauthorised religious structures on roads and near drains were an insult to God.

The apex court had further stated that everyone has the right to walk and God never intended to obstruct the path meant for the people. "Why shouldn't these structures go," questioned a bench comprising SC Justices Gopal Gowda and Arun Misra.

Tirath Singh Rawat takes oath as new Uttarakhand Chief Minister

Tirath Singh Rawat took an oath as the Chief Minister of Uttarakhand on March 10, 2021. The Lok Sabha MP from Garhwal, Tirath Singh Rawat has been elected as the leader of the BJP Legislature Party paving the way for Rawat to take over as a Chief Minister of Uttarakhand, a day after Trivendra Singh Rawat resigned from the top post.



The news of the new CM of the state was announced by Trivendra Singh Rawat after the meeting of the BJP legislature party.

The Choice of electing Tirath Singh Rawat as the new Chief Minister of Uttarakhand has also come as a surprise for many as he was not among the favourites. The other names that were doing the round for the top post were Ajay Bhatt, Dhan Singh Rawat, and Anil Baluni.

Tirath Singh Rawat takes oath:

Tirath Singh Rawat took an oath as a new Chief Minister of Uttarakhand on March 10. He took the charge of the top position after the resignation of Trivendra Singh Rawat amid the internal conflict.

PM Modi congratulates the new CM:

Prime Minister Modi has extended his wishes to Tirath Singh Rawat for taking oath as the new Chief Minister of Uttarakhand. Prime Minister added that Rawat brings with him vast organisational and administrative experience and that he is confident that under his leadership Uttarakhand will continue to scale new heights of progress.

Tirath Singh Rawat extends gratitude:

After being elected as the Chief Minister-designate of Uttarakhand, Rawat extended his gratitude to PM Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, and BJP Chief JP Nadda for trusting him with the responsibility as he is a mere party worker who comes from a small village.

Tirath Singh Rawat further added that he had never imagined that he would reach here and that he will make all the efforts to meet people's expectations and will take forward the work done in the last 4 years.

About Tirath Singh Rawat:

- From 2013 to 2015, Tirath Singh Rawat was the party chief of BJP Uttarakhand. Currently, he is a national secretary of the BJP.
- From 2012 to 2017, Tirath Singh Rawat was an MLA from the Chaubattakhal constituency.
- He also held the post of the first education minister of the newly formed Uttarakhand. In 2007, he was elected as the state general secretary of the state.
- Among other prestigious positions, Tirath Singh Rawat has been a Chief Electoral Officer of Uttarakhand as well as state membership chief.
- Rawat had earlier served as the state vice president of Uttar Pradesh Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha.

Political crisis in Uttarakhand:

Trivendra Singh Rawat had submitted his resignation to Governor Baby Rani Maurya at Raj Bhavan on March 9, 2021, a year before the state is scheduled to go to the polls.

There have been complaints from various Uttarakhand BJP MLAs over Rawat's style of governance.

His resignation had come after the former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Dr. Raman Singh and BJP General Secretary in-charge of Uttarakhand Dushyant Kumar Gautam had submitted a report to the central leadership of BJP explaining the rebellion against Rawat in the state unit of the party.

BJP had swept the elections in Uttarakhand in 2017 by winning 57 seats in the 70 member Uttarakhand Assembly. On the other hand, Congress had won just 11 seats.

Delhi to bid for 2048 Olympics: Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced on March 9, 2021 that **Delhi will bid to host the 2048 Olympics**. The CM said that a vision has been provided for the same in the Delhi Budget presented in the state assembly.

Kejriwal further stated that Delhi will take up whatever infrastructure and other necessities that are needed to be created for it. He continued by saying Delhi's Finance Minister Manish Sisodia has made a great budget, which keeps in mind people of all sections of the society.

Delhi's Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Manish Sisodia presented a budget worth Rs 69,000 crore for the financial year 2021-22 in the state assembly on March 9, 2021.

Delhi aims to have per capita income equivalent to Singapore by 2047

The Deputy CM said that the Delhi government aims to increase the per capita income of the national capital and make it equivalent to Singapore's level by 2047. He noted that a growth of 16 percent will be required to successfully achieve the goal. He said it will be difficult but the state government will work to make it a success.

India can host the Olympics before 2048: IOA President

- The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) president Narinder Batra responded to Delhi CM's statement of Delhi making a bid for hosting Olympics in 2048, saying that the Chief Minister should have discussed the matter with them first.
- He said that it is a welcome step if they are thinking of it but it should have been taken after discussing it with the Indian Olympic Association. The IOA President said that they can send an expression of interest but bidding is a different process.
- The IOA President further said that Delhi alone can't stage the Olympics, multiple cities will have to be involved. He added saying that there are many things involved in any competition.
- He further stated that Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Sports Complex in Motera is the best option for opening and closing ceremony of Olympics as of now from his point of view.
- The IOA President also said that India can definitely host the Olympics before 2048.

Background

The Delhi state government has allocated Rs 50 crores in this year's budget to provide free COVID-19 vaccines to the people of the national capital.

The COVID-19 vaccines will be available free of cost for all people of Delhi in government hospitals.

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat resigns

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat resigned from his position on March 9, 2021. The Chief Minister announced the decision himself during a press conference.

The Chief Minister announced that he had submitted his resignation to Uttarakhand Governor Baby Rani Maurya at the Raj Bhawan earlier today. He

informed that the BJP legislature party meeting has been scheduled for 10 am on March 10, 2021 at the party office.

Trivendra Singh Rawat said that his party gave him the golden opportunity to serve the State for four years. "I had never thought that I would get such an opportunity. The party has now decided that the opportunity to serve as CM should be given to someone else now," said Rawat during the press conference in Dehradun

Key Details

The Uttarakhand CM had met BJP National President JP Nadda on March 8, 2021. There have been reports of discontent among a few BJP MLAs and MP over Rawat's functioning style.

Trivendra Singh Rawat had been named BJP's Chief Ministerial candidate when the party had come to power in 2017, clinching 57 out of the total 70 Assembly seats.

Uttarakhand Politics

No Uttarakhand Chief Minister except ND Tiwari has completed a full term before. Both the national parties- BJP and Congress have changed their Chief Ministers right before elections.

Odisha government to set up Direct Investment Promotion Agencies

The Odisha government announced on March 7, 2021, that it will set up District Investment Promotion Agencies- DIPAs in 30 districts in order to promote and facilitate investment across the state.

As per the Industries department, DIPA in each of the 30 districts will operate under the leadership of the District Collector along with other senior district officials including DFOs, SPs, and line department officials being the constituent members.

The DIPAs will be working as an extended arm of the Industrial Promotion and Investment Corporation of Odisha- IPICOL and will be set up in phases from April 2021 to December 2021.

Significance:

The District Investment Promotion Agencies will play an active and effective role in setting up large as well as MSMEs projects in the respective districts. It will provide a significant boost to the business environment in the state and will generate significant local employment.

Key Highlights:

- The District Collector leading DIPA will be supported by a team of professionals for the project monitoring, investment facilitation, and promoting local entrepreneurship.
- Their performance will be monitored by the State Level Single Window Clearance Authority. It will also be evaluated through the annual rankings of districts which will be based on the investor feedback.
- The increase in investment will necessitate stronger landholding and the facilitation of industrial projects at the district level. It will help in the quick development of the linked infrastructure facilities.
- Industrial development will further help in creating employment opportunities for the youth of Odisha.

Key roles of DIPAs:

- Facilitating and handholding entrepreneurs during the project implementation.
- Promoting enterprises for creating large-scale employment.
- Investment promotion leveraging the local strengths of respective districts.
- Ensuring the early resolution of investor grievances.
- Creating a land bank for fast project implementation.
- Closely monitoring the implementation of power supply, road, and water supply projects, which will promote industrialization and economic growth.

Aviation Minister flags off first passenger flight to Bareilly from Delhi



The Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri flagged off the first commercial passenger flight to Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh from the Delhi airport on March 8, 2021. The inaugural flight was operated by an all-women crew.

According to the official statement by the Civil Aviation Ministry, the Bareilly airport has been upgraded for commercial flight operations under the government's regional connectivity scheme- Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik.

On International Women's Day, the all-women crew operated Delhi-Bareilly's inaugural flight of Alliance Air. It will be deploying its ATR 72-600 aircraft, which can easily seat around 70 passengers on the Delhi to Bareilly route.

Key Highlights:

- The flagging off the passenger flight for Bareilly airport has marked the commencement of the 56th airport under the UDAN Scheme.
- It also marks the successful operationalization of the 8th airport of Uttar Pradesh after Varanasi, Lucknow, Kanpur, Gorakhpur, Prayagraj, Hindon, and Agra.
- People will be able to fly easily by a flight of 60 minutes from Delhi to Bareilly. Earlier they had to opt for a train journey of more than 4 hours or by road for more than 6 hours.

How the air connectivity will benefit Bareilly?

- The direct air connectivity to Bareilly will fulfill the aspirations of lakhs of people who visit Bareilly for multiple purposes. Bareilly is also a centre for cotton, furniture manufacturing, sugar, and cereal trading.
- The connectivity will benefit the people of Bareilly as well as the entire Uttar Pradesh state.

- Apart from enhancing the aerial connectivity of the region, direct flight will provide additional benefits to tourism, trade, and the local economy of the region.

Bareilly airport to handle both commercial and IAF operations:

Bareilly Airport, till now, did not handle commercial flight operations and was only an airbase of the Indian Air Force.

The Indian Air Force had handed over the land to the Airport Authority of India for constructing infrastructure for the commercial passenger flight operations. Now the Bareilly airport will be handling both the operations.

Under the UDAN scheme of the central government, the financial help from the state, central government, and airport operators have been extended to the selected airlines. It encourages operations from under-served and unserved airports as well as keeps airfares affordable.

Himachal Pradesh government inaugurates projects worth Rs. 34 crores in Solan



The Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh Jai Ram Thakur on March 7, 2021, inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of projects worth Rs. 34 crores in Solan.

While speaking at the occasion, the Chief Minister stated that the formation of the Municipal Corporation in Solan will ensure the proper planning and systematic development of the town so that it can maintain its fame and glory.

He further added that Solan is one of the most centrally located and lively towns of Himachal which has been attracting people from all parts of the state to settle here because of its pleasant environment.

Key Highlights:

- The Chief Minister inaugurated the increase of Tehsil Kandaghat, Lift Water Supply Scheme Badron, Gram Panchayat Satrol constructed worth Rs. 1.41 crores.
- A COVID ICU hospital at the Regional Hospital Solan has also been constructed at Rs. 93 lakh.
- On the occasion, Rs. 2 crores have been announced for Transport Nagar Solan, Rs. 2 crores will be for the planned development of 17 wards of the Municipal Corporation, Solan, and Rs. 2 crores for the three new parking at Solan.
- A CT Scan and Digital X-ray plant will also be established in Civil Hospital Solan and adequate posts of doctors will be filled in Kandaghat and Solan hospitals.
- Work on the indoor stadium Solan and Kandaghat Stadium will also be taken by the state government soon.

Ensuring people's participation in grassroots institution:

The Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh while speaking on the occasion stated that the need has been felt to ensure systematic, planned, and proper development of Solan. It was thus decided by the state government to upgrade the Municipal Council of Solan into the Municipal Corporation.

He further informed that the present government has constituted seven Nagar panchayats, 412 new gram panchayats, and three Municipal corporations in HP for ensuring active participation of the people in the grassroots institutions of democracy.

The Chief Minister also pointed out that several schemes such as Chief Minister's helpline 100, Jan Manch, Sahara Vojana, Him Care, Gharini Suvidha Vojana have also extremely benefitted the people of the state.

Delhi Cabinet approves constitution of Delhi Board of School Education



Delhi Chief Arvind Kejriwal announced that the Delhi Cabinet gave approval to the constitution of a **Delhi Board of School Education** on March 6, 2021.

The Delhi CM said that there are around 1000 govt schools & 1700 private schools in Delhi. All government & private schools here are affiliated with CBSE.

Key Highlights

- In the new academic session 2021-22, 20-25 schools will be included in the new Delhi Board of School Education.
- The CBSE affiliation of these schools will be scrapped and they will be affiliated to the new Delhi board.
- The schools will be selected after discussion with Principals, teachers and parents.
- The Delhi CM said that they hope that all schools voluntarily get affiliated with this Board within 4-5 years.

Delhi Board of School Education

The Delhi Board of School Education will have two bodies:

1. **Governing Body**- Chaired by Education Minister.
2. **Executive Body for day-to-day function**- Headed by a CEO.

Both the Bodies will comprise experts from the education sector, industry, bureaucrats and principals of government and private schools.

Focus

The Delhi Chief Minister said that the focus will not be on learning by rote but it will be on the understanding of concepts and personality development.

The Chief Minister added saying that the students will be assessed through the year and the education system will be based at par with international standards.

Meghalaya government launches programme to help farmers and producer groups



The Chief Minister of Meghalaya Conrad K Sangma on March 3, 2021, launched a programme that will ensure that farmer and producer groups get the timely availability of better marketing infrastructure, adequate quality inputs, and transportation facilities.

The CM also announced that the state government will be spending Rs. 200 crores over the next 2 years under the 'Chief Minister's Mobilisation Support for Producers' program in order to help producer and farmer groups to level up their enterprises.

The programme will ensure the availability of quality inputs to farmers and will also help them in accessing credit, better transportation, extension services and improve marketing infrastructure.

Objective of Chief Minister's Mobilisation Support for Producers program:

According to the Chief Minister's Office, the purpose of the program is to train, identify and form the producer groups, collective marketing centres, and service providers across Meghalaya.

The formation of the group will further enable the state government in achieving the program objectives by ensuring the timely availability of access to credit, quality inputs, better transportation, etc.

State government's support to the producer groups:

- 1,260 producers are being supported by the government under the Meghalaya Livelihood and Access to Market Projects (Megha-LAMP), while under the PRIME initiative, support is provided to 936 producer groups.
- In the coming months, the state will disburse Rs. 9.4 crores to the groups under Megha-LAMP and Rs. 6.1 crores will be given to groups under PRIME.
- Each member of the producer groups also gets a mobilization fund of Rs. 5,000. Each service provider will get a mobilization fund of Rs. 50,000 and each of the collecting marketing centre get a zero-interest loan of Rs. 7 lakh.
- At the launch of the program, almost Rs. 3.5 crores were distributed to award 21 service providers, 90 producer groups, and 38 collective marketing centres.
- Encouraging entrepreneurship for individual's growth:

The Chief Minister of Meghalaya while launching the program stated that apart from many development projects that are significant for the people and state, the government was very clear that there must be an improvement in every individual's life.

He added that the government wanted to take steps to transform the lives of the people at the grassroot level but realized that there are many gaps in the system.

As the government started looking into these gaps, it realized that entrepreneurship is the base and area that touches every aspect of life. The state government further started recognizing and promoting the entrepreneurs and in order to provide them guidance, it started giving them different kinds of training and even started the PRIME Hubs.

Odisha CM sanctions scholarship worth Rs 101 cr for SC, ST students



Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has sanctioned **Rs 101 crore** for providing **scholarships to 50,000 Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students**.

Speaking at an event, the Chief Minister said that Education is the basis of reformation and my government has always focused on education and because of this SC

& ST students have been excelling in various fields.

Benefits

- A total of 1.5 lakh students will be benefited through the programme, as per the Chief Minister.
- They can avail of post-matric scholarships through the Odisha State Scholarship portal directly in their bank account.
- The sanctioned scholarship amount will be transferred directly to the bank accounts of beneficiary students.

Three Akanshya hostels inaugurated, My Hostel cards launched

The Odisha CM also inaugurated three 'Akanshya' hostels and 68 other hostels. CM Patnaik also launched 'My Hostel' cards, which will benefit 5.75 lakh students living in hostels.

Benefits

- The Odisha CM said that the move will benefit around 5.75 lakh students in getting proper accommodation and study facilities in 6,700 hostels constructed for SC & ST students.
- He added saying that steps have been taken to provide proper education to them.

- He further also spoke about a nutrition programme for tribes, saying that it is an important programme of the state government.

Haryana government approves bill to reserve 75% jobs in private sector for locals



The Deputy Chief Minister of Haryana Dushyant Chautala announced on March 2, 2021, that the governor of the state Satyadev Narayan Arya has approved the bill that will provide 75% reservation in the private sector jobs with a gross salary of up to Rs. 50,000 per month to the people of the state. The legislation was passed by the state Assembly in 2020.

The Deputy Chief Minister while informing about the decision added that this is a day of happiness for the youths of Haryana. They will now get 75% reservation in every company, society, and trust.

Providing reservations in the private sector jobs for locals was the main election promise of Dushyant Chautala's Jannayak Janata Party, which formed the government in the state in alliance with BJP after winning 10 of the 90 seats.

Key Highlights:

- The bill, tabled by the Dushyant Chautala in 2020, makes it compulsory for the private sector companies to reserve 75% of the jobs with a salary up to 50,000 for the people of the state.
- The bill by the government also contains clause companies can invoke in case they are not able to find suitable candidates. In this case, the company can hire from outside as long as they inform the government of such a step.
- The companies must register the details of the employees getting Rs. 50,000 per month and in case they fail to do so within three months, it will attract penalties.
- According to the state government, the reservation will be economically, socially, and environmentally desirable.

Haryana government faces pressure from farming community:

The BJP-led state government has been facing intense pressure from the farming community who has been protesting against the three agricultural laws of the central government.

Dushyant Chautala, whose core voter base comprises of jat farmers, had promised in 2020 that he will quit politics if he is not able to secure minimum support price which is one of the main demands of the farmers.

Amid the speculation of tension within the alliance. He met PM Modi and the Home Minister Amit Shah in January 2021. After the meeting, the Deputy CM confirmed that the government will complete its 5 years term.

Himachal Pradesh Government inaugurates projects worth Rs. 29 crores in Doon Vidhan Sabha

The Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh Jai Ram Thakur on February 28, 2021, laid the foundation stone of various projects worth Rs. 29 crores in the Doon Vidhan Sabha area of Solan district.

The Chief Minister of the state, while inaugurating the projects, informed that an amount of over Rs. 203 crores have already been spent on various developmental projects in the area in the last 3 years. Jai Ram Thakur also directed the officers to ensure that all the developmental projects inaugurated by him in the area are completed on time.

Government's efforts for the development in the state so far:

Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh took this occasion to highlight the steps taken by the state government for the development of the state and people.

- The very first decision of the state cabinet, after assuming office, was to lower the age limit to avail the old age pension without any income limit from 80 years to 70 years.
- The second decision by the government was to establish cow sanctuaries in the state so that they were not left stray.

- The state cabinet also decided to levy a cess of Rs. 2 per bottle of liquor for providing financial assistance to construct cow sanctuaries and Gau Sadans in Himachal Pradesh.

Chief Minister thanked the people of the state:

The Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh thanked the people for their overwhelming support and cooperation to the present government during the last three years.

The Chief Minister added that the BJP-led present government in the state has successfully brought back home about 2.50 lakh people of the state who were stranded in various parts of the country during the lockdown.

He also informed that the efforts will be made to open a primary health centre at Manpura and for the up-gradation of High School Jharmajri to Senior Secondary School.

The Chief Minister laid the foundation stone of four laning of Sun City road from Baddi entry point bridge to the petrol pump near SP office which will be built at a cost of Rs. 4 crores, Community Health Centre at Barotiwala which will be constructed at a cost of Rs. 2 crores.

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News Capsule

Oscars 2021 nominations: Check the complete list of nominees



The nominations for the 93rd Academy Awards were announced on March 15, 2021, by actor-producer Priyanka Chopra and husband Nick Jonas. The nominations for the prestigious award were announced for a total of 23 categories.

Mank, a 2020 American Biographical film, is leading the pack with 10 nominations. Chadwick Boseman, Black

Panther actor who passed away in 2020 due to cancer, has also been nominated for the Best Actor category for his work in **Ma Rainey's Black Bottom**.

The nominations this year also held few surprises as the names of women directors and actors of color have made to the list. The awards were heavily criticized in 2020 for overlooking women in the actors of color and the directing category, however, it has been remedied in this year's nominees.

The Academy Awards will be held on April 25, 2021, (April 26 for India), 2 months later than usual because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The ceremony of the Oscars 2021 will take place in two locations in Los Angeles.

Check the complete list of nominees in the total of 23 categories announced by the Academy Motion of Picture Arts and Sciences

Category	Nominees
Best Actress in Supporting Role	• Maria Bakalova, a Borat Subsequent Movie Film • Glenn Close, Hillbilly Elegy • Olivia Colman, The Father

	• Amanda Seyfried, Mank • Yuh-Jung Youn, Minari
Best Costume Design	• Emma • Mank • Ma Rainey's Black Bottom • Mulan • Pinocchio
Best Original Score	• Da 5 Bloods • Mank • Minari • News of the World • Soul
Best Adapted Screenplay	• Borat Subsequent Movie Film (Sacha Baron Cohen, Peter Baynham, Anthony Hines, Jena Friedman, Lee Kern, Erica Rivinoja, Dan Mazer, and Dan Swimer) • The Father (Florian Zeller and Christopher Hampton) • Nomadland (Chloe Zhao) • One Night in Miami (Kemp Powers) • The White Tiger (Ramin Bahrani)
Best Original Screenplay	• Judas and the Black Messiah (Shaka King, Will Berson, Kenny Lucas, and Keith Lucas)

	• Minari (Lee Issac Chung) • Promising Young Woman (Emerald Fennell) • Sound of Metal (Abraham Marder, Derek Cianfrance, and Darius Marder) • The Trial of the Chicago 7 (Aaron Sorkin)
Best Animated Short Film	• Burrow • Genius Loci • If Anything Happens I Love You • Opera • Yes-People
Best Live Action Short Film	• Feeling Through • The Letter Room • The Present • Two Distant Strangers • White Eye
Best Actor in a Supporting Role	• Sacha Baron Cohen, The Trial of the Chicago 7 • Daniel Kaluuya, Judas and the black Messiah • Leslie Odom, Jr., One Night in Miami • Paul Raci, Sound of Metal • LaKeith Stanfield, Judas and the

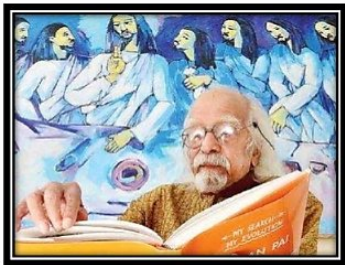
	Black Messiah
Best Documentary Feature	• Collective • Crip Camp • The Mole Agent • My Octopus Teacher • Time
Best Documentary Short Subject	• Colette • A Concerto is a Conversation • Do Not Split • Hunger ward • A Love Song for Latasha
Best International Feature Film	• Denmark, Another Round • Hong Kong, Better Days • Romania, Collective • Tunisia, The Man who sold his skin • Bosnia and Herzegovina, Quo Vadis, Aida?
Best Sound	• Greyhound • Mank • News of the World • Sound of Metal • Soul

Best production Design	• The Father • Ma Rainey's Black Bottom • Mank • News of The World • Tenet
Best Film Editing	• The Father • Nomadland • Promising Young Woman • Sound of Metal • The Trial of the Chicago 7
Best Cinematography	• Judas and the Black Messiah • Mank • News of The World • Nomadland • The Trial of the Chicago 7
Best Visual Effects	• Love and Monsters • The Midnight Sky • Mulan • The One and Only Ivan • Tenet
Best Animated Feature Film	• Onward • Over the Moon

	• A Shaun the Sheep Movie: Farmageddon • Soul • Wolfwalkers
Best Makeup and Hair Styling	• Emma • Hillbilly Elegy • Ma Rainey's Black Bottom • Mank • Pinocchio
Best Original Song	• 'Husavik' from Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga • 'Fight for You' from Judas and the Black Messiah • 'lo Si (Seen)' from The Life Ahead • 'Speak Now' from One Night in Miami • 'Hear My Voice' from The Trial of the Chicago 7
Best Actor in a Leading Role	• Riz Ahmed, Sound of Metal • Chadwick Boseman, Ma Rainey's Black Bottom • Anthony Hopkins, The Father • Gary Oldman, Mank • Steven Yeun, Minari

Best Actress in a Leading Role	• Viola Davis, Ma Rainey's Black Bottom • Andra Day, The United States vs. Billie Holiday • Vanessa Kirby, Pieces of a Woman • Frances McDormand, Nomadland • Carrey Mulligan, Promising Young Woman
Best Director	• Thomas Vinterburg, Another Round • Emerald Fennell, Promising Young Woman • David Fincher, Mank • Lee Issac Chung, Minari • Chloe Zhao, Nomadland
Best Picture	• The Father • Judas and the Black Messiah • Mank • Minari • Nomadland • Promising Young Woman • Sound of Metal • The Trial of the Chicago 7

Renowned artist Laxman Pai passes away at 95



Renowned artist and Padma Bhushan awardee **Laxman Pai** passed away at his residence in Goa on March 14, 2021. He was 95.

Goa Chief Minister Dr. Pramod Sawant tweeted saying, "Deeply saddened by the passing away of renowned Goan artist Padma Bhushan Shri Laxman Pai. Goa has lost a gem today. We will always

remember his immense contribution in the field of art. My heartfelt condolences to his family."

Union Minister of State for AYUSH Shripad Y Naik also tweeted, "Saddened to hear the demise of great Indian artist and painter, former principal of the Goa College of Art, Padma Bhushan Laxman Pai ji. May God give strength to his family to bear the loss. Om Shanti."

Former UP CM Akhilesh Yadav also tweeted a post that read, "My art is dedicated to the 'Invisible Force'. I explore forms of this force through my work, just as Gandhi experimented with the truth. I can best explain it through my artwork, Tree of Life. RIP #LaxmanPai ji"

All you need to know about Laxman Pai

- Laxman Pai was an Indian artist and painter. He served as the **Principal of the Goa College of Art** from 1977 to 1987.
- He was a recipient of several awards including the prestigious **Padma Bhushan, Padma Shri, Nehru Award** and **Lalit Kala Akademi Award**.
- His tryst with art began when he used to touch up black and white photographs with paint at his uncle's Mauzo Photo Studio in Margao.
- He was actively involved in the **Goa liberation movement** in the 1940s. He was also arrested for the same three times by the Portuguese.
- His parents later sent him to Mumbai to study in the **Sir J. J. School of Art** from 1943 to 1947. He later started teaching in the same school.
- At the same time, he also participated in the activities of the **Bombay**
-

Progressive Artists' Group.

- Pai later went to Paris and studied fresco and etching at the prestigious **École des Beaux-Arts**. He stayed in Paris for ten years, during which, he also held ten solo exhibitions in the city.
- He also learned Rosenthal porcelain art in Germany and took part in numerous Biennials in Paris, Tokyo, Sao Paulo.
- He returned to India in 1977 and took the post of the principal of the Goa College of Art. He played an instrumental role in creating the new college campus in the Altinho area of Panaji.

Laxman Pai's works

- Initially, Laxman Pai was largely inspired by **Goan subjects** and the concept of Indian miniatures. His works mainly spoke about the Goan way of life.
- He was also inspired by **ancient Egyptian sculptures**.
- He used to listen to music while painting and had painted many paintings based on different ragas of Indian classical music.
- He also gives a visual interpretation to the moods of the music as determined by the vibrations of the notes.
- His painting series, '**Musical Moods**' (1965) was inspired by Indian classical ragas. Pai also used to play the sitar and the bansuri.
- His paintings are on display at prestigious art galleries and museums such as National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, Museum of Modern Art, Paris, Berlin Museum, New York Public Library, Madras Museum, Nagpur Museum, Ben and Abby Grey Foundation and Punjab University Museum.

INS Karanj: Third Scorpene-Class Submarine commissioned into Indian Navy



INS Karanj, India's third Scorpene-class submarine, was commissioned into the Indian Navy on March 10, 2021.

The diesel-electric submarine was commissioned into the Navy in the presence of Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Karambir Singh and Admiral (Retired) VS Shekhawat in Mumbai.

Key Highlights

- INS Karanj is part of six Scorpene-class submarines being built under Project-75 by Mazagon Dock Limited in Mumbai.
- Two Scorpene-class submarines- INS Kalvari and INS Khanderi have already been commissioned into the Indian Navy.
- The fourth and fifth Scorpene-class submarines- INS Vela & INS Vagir have been undergoing sea trials.
- The sixth scorpene class submarine named Vagsheer is currently under construction.

Significance

The Scorpene-class submarines are one of the quietest conventional submarines that are currently in service around the world.

The submarines can be deployed in different roles such as guarding strategic points in the sea, laying mines, gathering intelligence, dropping marine commandos and engaging with enemy ships when required.

Background

Project 75 was taken up due to the decreasing number of submarines in the Indian Navy. The Navy required replacements for older Sindhughosh and Shishumar class submarines.

The scorpene-class submarines have been designed by France Naval Group and built in India by Mazagon Dock Limited under Project 75. India chose the Scorpene design in 2005 and ordered six submarines for US\$3 billion under Project 75.

The submarines are being constructed locally by the Mazagon Dock Limited shipyard in Mumbai, with the assistance of the Naval Group.

French billionaire and MP Olivier Dassault killed in helicopter crash

The French Member of Parliament and billionaire Olivier Dassault died in a helicopter crash on March 7, 2021. He was 69 years old.

Dassault, a lawmaker with the center-right Republicans Party, was killed in Calavdos in Normandy, Northern France. He was last seen in a public engagement on March 5 in Beauvais near Paris with Interior Minister Gerard Darmanin and Prime Minister of France Jean Castex.



The President of France Emmanuel Macron took to Twitter to pay his tributes to Dassault and stated that he never ceased to serve our country and to value its assets and his sudden death is a great loss.

Olivier Dassault was the eldest son of Serge Dassault, the billionaire industrialist, whose group owns Le Figaro newspaper and also builds the Rafale warplanes.

Many of his colleagues on political rights also paid tribute to a man who was also a pilot, a passionate photographer, and a composer of the music.

Background:

The Dassault Aviation group has been a leading plane manufacturer of France for the last 70 years and is behind the Mirage warplane, Falcon private jet, and state-of-the-art Rafale fighter.

According to Forbes magazine, Olivier Dassault was the 361st most wealthy person in 2020. His fortune was estimated to around 5 billion euros – around the same as his three other siblings.

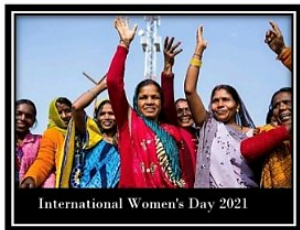
Olivier Dassault belonged to a famed family. His grandfather Marcel Bloch was a famed aeronautical engineer who had changed his name to Dassault meaning 'on the attack' in French.

After helping in developing an innovative propeller that was used on French aircraft in World War 1, Marcel Bloch was imprisoned during World War II and was deported to a Nazi Concentration Camp after he refused to collaborate with a German aviation company.

The control of Dassault Aviation company was passed to Serge Dassault, father of Olivier. However, he did not name an heir who will succeed him when he passed away in the year 2018. Olivier had once declared himself as the most qualified among his siblings, which earned a stern public rebuke from her father.

Olivier had resigned as the Chairman of the group's supervisory board after his father's death because for him the role was incompatible with his parliamentary duties.

International Women's Day 2021: **Women in News in 2021, Top initiatives for women empowerment in India**



International Women's Day

2021: International Women's Day was observed on March 8, 2021. The day celebrates the achievements of women and calls for action to empower women to create a gender-equal world.

The theme of International Women's Day

2021 is **#ChooseToChallenge**. "A challenged

world is an alert world and from challenge comes change. So let's all choose to challenge."

The International Day highlights how we can help to forge a gender-equal world- by celebrating women's achievements, taking action for gender equality and raising awareness against bias.

Following are few women whose achievements this year have created a new history, marking the beginning of a new world.

Women in News in 2021

1. Kamala Harris

Kamala Harris created history by becoming the first female, African-American and Asian-American to be sworn in as Vice President of the United States. The 56-year-old was born to immigrant parents from India and Jamaica.

2. Ngozi Okonjo- Iweala

Ngozi Okonjo- Iweala has become the new Chief of the World Trade Organisation. She is the first woman and African to hold the position at WTO. She was appointed after she received the complete support of Joe Biden's administration on February 5, 2021. She is the former Finance Minister of Nigeria and will hold the position from March 1, 2021, to August 31, 2025.

3. Kaja Kallas

Kaja Kallas became the first female Prime Minister of Estonia on January 26, 2021 after the new two-party coalition government was sworn in. This would be the first time that the Baltic nation will be led by a woman ever since it regained independence in 1991. Kaja Kallas is a lawyer, former European Parliament Member and daughter of former Prime Minister of Estonia, Sim Kallas.

4. Linda Thomas-Greenfield

Linda Thomas-Greenfield was confirmed by the US Senate on February 23, 2021 as the US ambassador to the United Nations. She will be the third African-American and the second African American woman to hold the post of UN ambassador to the UN. She is a three-decade veteran of the US State Department.

5. Bhawana Kanth

Flight Lieutenant Bhawana Kanth was the first woman fighter pilot to take part in the parade of Republic Day 2021. She was a part of the tableau of the Indian Air Force that showcased the LAC- Light Combat Aircraft, the Sukhoi-30 fighter plane, and light combat helicopter.

Bhawana Kanth was also one of the first women fighter pilots in the Indian Air Force. She was inducted in IAF in 2016 along with Mohana Singh and Avani Chaturvedi as the first women fighter pilots.

6. Dr. Swati Mohan

Dr. Swati Mohan was the Indian American woman who led the complex landing operation of NASA's Perseverance rover on Mars. Perseverance rover became the fifth NASA rover to successfully touch down on the Red Planet after Sojourner, twin rovers Spirit and Opportunity and Curiosity.

Dr. Mohan had spearheaded the development of attitude control and the landing system for the rover. She was also the lead systems engineer during the development process of the rover. She has been a part of many important NASA missions in the past including the Cassini mission and GRAIL.

Top Government initiatives for women empowerment in India

To create a gender-equal world, the first step is providing equal opportunities to women and enabling their welfare and safety and providing ease in day-to-day living.

Following are few schemes that were launched by the government in recent years to empower women, especially those living in rural areas.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana: Launched in January 2015, the scheme aims to celebrate the girl child and enable her education. The scheme's main objectives are to prevent gender-biased sex-selective eliminations, ensure survival and protection of girl child and ensure the education of the girl child.

One Stop Centre Scheme: The One Stop Centre will provide support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces.

Women Helpline Scheme: The scheme aims to provide 24 hours immediate and emergency response to women affected by violence through referral and information about women-related government schemes programs across the country through a single uniform number.

UJJAWALA scheme: The scheme's objective is to prevent trafficking of women and children for commercial sexual exploitation through social mobilization and involvement of local communities, awareness generation programmes, generate public discourse through workshops/seminars and such events and any other innovative activity

Mahila-E-Haat: Mahila-E-Haat was launched in 2016 as a bilingual online marketing platform that leverages technology to help aspiring women entrepreneurs, self-help groups, and NGOs to showcase their products and services.

Mahila Shakti Kendra: The Mahila Shakti Kendra was launched in 2017 to empower rural women with opportunities for skill development, employment, digital literacy, health and nutrition. The Kendras work through community engagement through student volunteers in the 115 most backward districts.

About International Women's Day

International Women's Day mainly celebrates the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. The day has occurred over a century, as the first IWD gathering took place in 1911 and received the support of over a million people.

The colors of International Women's Day are Purple, Green and White. While Purple stands for justice and dignity, Green symbolizes hope and White represents purity.

DRDO conducts successful flight test of SFDR technology

The Defence Research and Development Organisation on March 5, 2021, successfully conducted a flight test of the Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet- SFDR missile propulsion system from the Integrated Test Range in Chandipur, Odisha.

According to an official statement from DRDO, all the subsystems, including nozzle less motor and booster motor, performed at the test as expected.

The launch of SFDR was monitored by the senior scientists of various DRDO labs, including Research Centre Imarat, Defence Research, and Development Authority- DRDL, and High Energy Materials Research Laboratory- HEMRL.

The Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh also congratulated the Indian Air Force and the scientists of DRDO on the successful flight test of Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet.

Technological advantage to DRDO:

The official statement by DRDO mentioned that the successful demonstration of SFDR technology has provided the Defence Research and Development Organisation a technological advantage which will enable the government organisation in developing long-range air-to-air missiles.

It further added that at present this form of technology is currently available only in a handful of countries.

Flight test of SFDR: Key Details

- The performance of the missile was monitored with the help of data captured by Radar, Electro-Optical, and Telemetry instruments which were deployed by ITR and confirmed the demonstration of the mission objectives.
- During the flight-test, many new technologies, which included Solid Fuel based Ducted Ramjet Technology was also proven during the test.
- At the time of the test, air-launch was stimulated with the use of a booster motor. The nozzle-less booster speeded up it to the required Mach number for the Ramjet operation.

Launch of Sindhu Netra Satellite:

The Sindhu Netra Satellite which has been developed by DRDO was successfully deployed in space on February 28, 2021. The satellite by DRDO is capable of automatically identifying the merchant ships and warships operating in the Indian Ocean Region.

PM Narendra Modi receives CERAWeek global energy and environment leadership award

Prime Minister Narendra Modi received the **CERAWeek global energy and environment leadership award** on March 5, 2021. The award recognises his commitment to sustainability in the energy and the environment.

While delivering the keynote address at the virtual award ceremony, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that this award recognises environmental leadership and it is commonly said that the best way to show is through action. He continued by saying that when it comes to caring for the environment, the people of India are the leaders, and it has been the case for centuries



The Prime Minister said that he accepts the CERA Week Global Energy and Environment Leadership Award with great humility and dedicates it to the people of

our great Motherland, India. He said that he dedicates the award to the glorious tradition of our land that has shown the way when it comes to caring for the environment.

He further said that in Mahatma Gandhi, we have one of the greatest environment champions to have ever lived and if humanity had followed the path given by him, we would not face many of the problems we do today.

He continued by saying that the most powerful way to fight climate change is behavioural change and today the world is focusing on fitness and wellness. He said that there is a growing demand for healthy and organic food and India can drive this global change through our spices, our Ayurveda products and more.

PM Modi highlighted that India's forest cover has grown significantly over the last seven years. He said that the population of lions, tigers, leopards and water fowls has grown, which are great indicators of positive behavioural changes.

What is CERAWeek?

- CERAWeek is short for Cambridge Energy Research Associates Week 2021. It is world's preeminent energy conference, which was held virtually between March 1-5, 2021.
- It was organised by IHS Markit, one of the leading source of information and insight in critical areas that shape today's business landscape.
- The year 2021 marks the 39th edition of the conference and this was the first time that it was held virtually.

Key Highlights PM Narendra Modi

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated in a special plenary on March 5, 2021 with Daniel Yergin, Vice Chairman of IHS Markit and conference chair.
- Speaking on India's position in the global energy environment, Yergin said that India has emerged at the center of global energy and the environment by charting its path towards economic growth, poverty reduction and a new energy future.

- He added saying that India's leadership is crucial to meet climate objectives for a sustainable future while ensuring universal energy access.
- He further stated that they are pleased to honor PM Narendra Modi with the CERAWEEK Global Energy and Environment Leadership Award for his commitment to expanding India's leadership in sustainable development to meet the country's, and the world's, future energy needs.

Background

The CERAWEEK is an annual international conference, which sees participation from policymakers, government officials, experts, energy industry leaders, leaders from the technology, financial and industrial communities and energy technology innovators.

Ease of Living Index 2020: Bengaluru, Shimla ranked as 'most livable' cities of India

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs on March 4, 2021, released the Ease of Living Index 2020, which provided a ranking of the cities with a population of more than a million and a population of less than a million.

In the million-plus cities, Bengaluru, Pune, and Ahmedabad have been ranked as the most livable cities in the country, while in less than a million category, Shimla followed by Bhubaneswar, Silvassa, Kakinada has been ranked as the most livable city.



Out of the 49 cities that were ranked on the livability index in the category of million-plus population, Delhi has been placed at the 13th spot and Srinagar is at the bottom. A total of 111 cities of India were judged in the Ease of Living Index 2020.

The Ministry also released the 'Municipal Performance Index' under which the New Delhi Municipal Council topped in less than million population category and Indore topped in the million-plus population category.

About Ease of Living Index:

It is an assessment tool that evaluates the impact of various initiatives of urban development and the quality of life in the cities of India. The Ease of Living Index provides a comprehensive understanding of the participating cities on the basis of the quality of life, sustainability, and economic ability.

The findings from the index help in guiding the evidence-based policymaking as well as promote healthy competition among the cities by encouraging them to learn from their peers and advance their development.

About Municipal Performance Index:

By expanding the scope of the Ease of Living Index framework, Municipal Performance Index was undertaken for the first time in India.

While EoLI measures an outcome of the indicator, the index of municipal performance focuses on the factors that produce those outcomes. It determines the elements that prevent efficient global governance.

The Municipal Performance Index is an effort for analyzing and assessing the performance of Indian municipalities on the basis of their defined functions.

Top 10 rankings:

Ease of Living Index

Ranking	Population Million +		Population Less than Million	
	City	Score	City	Score
1	Bengaluru	66.70	Shimla	60.90

2	Pune	66.27	Bhubaneswar	59.85
3	Ahmedabad	64.87	Silvassa	58.43
4	Chennai	62.61	Kakinada	56.84
5	Surat	61.73	Salem	56.40
6	Navi Mumbai	61.60	Vellore	56.38
7	Coimbatore	59.72	Gandhinagar	56.25
8	Vadodara	59.24	Gurugram	56.00
9	Indore	58.58	Davangere	55.25
10	Greater Mumbai	58.23	Tiruchirapalli	55.24

Municipal Performance Index

Ranking	Population Million +		Population Less than Million	
	Municipality	Score	Municipality	Score
1	Indore	66.68	New Delhi MC	52.92
2	Surat	60.82	Tirupati	51.69
3	Bhopal	59.04	Gandhinagar	51.59
4	Pimpri Chinchwad	59.00	Karnal	51.39
5	Pune	58.79	Salem	49.04

6	Ahmedabad	57.60	Tiruppur	48.92
7	Raipur	54.98	Bilaspur	47.99
8	Greater Mumbai	54.36	Udaipur	47.77
9	Vishakhapatnam	52.77	Jhansi	47.04
10	Vadodara	52.68	Tirunelveli	47.02

India signs key pact with Philippines for supply of BrahMos Cruise Missile

The Government of India on March 2, 2021, signed a key pact with the Philippines for the supply of defence material and equipment which are also likely to include BrahMos Cruise Missiles.

Delfin Lorenzana, the Defence Secretary of the Philippines, who also attended the agreement signing ceremony in Manila has stated that the Philippines will be buying BrahMos Missiles from India.

According to a Facebook post of the Philippine Department of National Defence, Raymundo Elefante, the Defence Undersecretary and India's Ambassador to the Philippines Shambu S. Kumaran have signed an implementing arrangement for the procurement of defence material and equipment.

BrahMos Missile: Indo-Russian Joint venture

Both India and Russia have been planning to export the BrahMos Supersonic Cruise Missile to the Philippines and several other countries.

The missile has been produced by Joint Venture of India and Russia. It can be launched from ships, submarines, land platforms, or aircraft. Various countries, including in the Gulf region have also shown interest in the procurement of the missile.

The Indian government has already deployed a sizeable number of the original BrahMos Missiles as well as other key assets in several strategic locations along the LAC with China in Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh.

Test-Firing of BrahMos Missile:

A naval version of the BrahMos missile was successfully test-fired, on October 18, 2020, from an indigenously built stealth destroyer of the Indian Navy in the Arabian Sea.

After few days, the Indian Air Force also test-fired an air-launched version of the missile from a Sukhoi fighter jet in the Bay of Bengal. The IAF has also been integrating the missile on over 40 Sukhoi fighter jets of the air force in order to bolster the overall combat capability of the force.

President Ram Nath Kovind receives first dose of Covid-19 vaccine



Indian President Ram Nath Kovind received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine on March 3, 2021. The President was administered the COVID-19 vaccine at the Army R&R Hospital in Delhi. He was accompanied by his daughter.

The President took the occasion to thank all the doctors, nurses, health workers and administrators who are successfully implementing the largest vaccination drive in history. He also urged all eligible citizens to get vaccinated.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had earlier on March 1, 2021 become the first person to receive his first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine under the second phase of India's COVID-19 vaccination drive.

The Prime Minister had received the dose of COVAXIN, indigenously developed by Bharat Biotech and ICMR, to address the hesitancy among citizens over India's homegrown vaccine.

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan also took the first shot of the COVID-19 vaccine along with his wife at the Delhi Heart and Lung Institute on March 2, 2021. The Minister was also administered the shot of India's indigenously made COVID-19 vaccine- COVAXIN.

He stated on the occasion that the vaccine will serve as a lifeline for all our countrymen against COVID-19. The Minister also assured that the Made-in-India vaccines are 100% safe and urged everyone eligible to get vaccinated quickly & ensure society's safety.

He also appealed to people to follow vaccine-appropriate behaviour such as taking the vaccine when it is their turn. He also urged the public to not panic if feel a little trouble after taking the dose and report it immediately to the doctor.

Goa chief minister Pramod Sawant also received his first shot of the Covid-19 vaccine on March 3rd. He appealed to all those eligible to come forward and get vaccinated.

Over 265 million people have been vaccinated against COVID-19 in India so far.

Russia, China sign MoU on lunar research station



Roscosmos Space Agency of Russia has informed that China and Russia signed a Memorandum of Understanding on March 9, 2021, to set up an international lunar research station.

The MoU between the two nations was signed by the head of the China National Space Administration Zhang Kejian and Chief of Roscosmos Dmitry Rogozin during a meeting via video conference.

Russia's space agency further mentioned that Beijing and Moscow will draw a roadmap for establishing the station and will corporate closely on designing,

planning, and implementing the project as well as presenting it to the global space community.

International Lunar Research Station

The International lunar science station will be a complex of research and experimental facilities which will be created on the surface or in orbit of the moon. The complex will be designed to conduct multipurpose and multidisciplinary research work.

Both China and Russia will also promote international cooperation on the project. They will offer equal access to any nation that wants to take part in the project.

China and Russia's collaboration in the lunar space station:

For the latest joint project in space, both countries will adhere to the principle of co-consultation, shared benefits, and joint construction.

China and Russia will facilitate extensive cooperation in the International Lunar Research Station, it will be open to all the interested countries which will further strengthen scientific research exchanges. The project will promote humanity's exploration and the use of outer space for peaceful purposes.

Deepening relations of Russia and China:

Russia and China have sought to deepen their relations in recent years, particularly since 2014 when Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine had badly strained its relations with the west.

In the early years of its space program, China drew heavily on Russian expertise but has largely formed its own path since the launching of its first crewed mission in 2003.

France conducts first military exercises in space

France has launched its first military exercises in space in order to test its ability to defend its satellites as well as other defence equipment from attack amid the growing competition between the world powers in Earth's orbit.

The Head of France's newly created Space Command Michel Friedling called the space exercises a stress test of the systems and mentioned that the exercises were a first for the French army as well as entire Europe.

The exercise, which has been codenamed 'AsterX' in the memory of the first French satellite from the year 1965, will be based on 18 simulated events in an operations room.

Objective of a military exercise in space:

At the time of the exercise, the French military will be monitoring a dangerous space object as well as a threat to its own satellite from any other foreign power with a considerable space force. According to Friedling, a series of events appear and create threats or crisis situations against the space infrastructure but only this.

Key Highlights:

- The German Space and US Space Force agencies have also been taking part in the French exercises. They began on March 8 and will run till March 12, 2021.
- The Space Command of France was announced in 2019 and aims to have 500 personnel by the year 2025.
- Investment by France in the space program is set to reach 4.3 billion euros over the budget period of 2019-2025. It is just a fraction of the amount spent by China or the United States.

Stopping the militarization of space:

The Defence Minister of France Florence Parly had stated that our allies and adversaries have been militarizing space.

She further added that France plans on developing anti-satellite laser weapons and new surveillance capabilities to close the gaps with rivals Russia, the US, and China.

France, in 2018, had accused Russia of trying to intercept the transmissions from a Franco-Italian satellite that was being used by the armies of France and Italy

for secure communications. Louch-Olymp, the Russian satellite, had allegedly approached the Athena-Fidus satellite in what France called 'an act of espionage'.

Amitabh Bachchan to be conferred with 2021 Film Archive Award

Indian Megastar **Amitabh Bachchan** will be conferred with the **2021 Film Archive Award** by the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) at a virtual ceremony scheduled to take place on March 19, 2021.

Legendary filmmakers **Christopher Nolan** and **Martin Scorsese** will present the prestigious award to Amitabh Bachchan. The iconic filmmakers have themselves been previous recipients of the award.



The award will be conferred to Amitabh Bachchan for his contribution to the preservation of and access to the world's film heritage for the benefit of present and future generations.

What is the International Federation of Film Archives?

The International Federation of Film Archives is an organisation of film archives and museums from across the world.

Key Highlights

- Amitabh Bachchan was nominated for the award by FIAF-affiliate Film Heritage Foundation, an Indian film archival organisation founded by Indian filmmaker and archivist Shivendra Singh Dungarpur.
- The filmmaker pointed out India's dismal track record in film preservation. He stated that India lost almost 70 percent of its films by 1950.
- He also brought attention to the fact that among the 1,338 silent films made in India, only around 29 survive and many only in fragments.

Dungarpur further highlighted that Amitabh Bachchan constructively wielded his influence to amplify the cause on a war footing in South Asia and that he was the unanimous choice of the 172 FIAF-affiliated archives for the award.

- Bachchan, during the opening ceremony of the 2018 Kolkata Film Festival, had delivered an impassioned speech on film preservation, saying that most films of Indian filmmaking legends have "gone up in flames or have been discarded on the scrap heap."
- He had said that "very little of this great film heritage survives, and if we do not take urgent steps to save what remains, in another hundred years there will be no memory of these films and nothing left to celebrate."

Martin Scorsese, who is widely regarded as one of the most influential directors in film history, also spoke about the Indian actor saying, "Amitabh Bachchan's advocacy for preserving India's film legacy has been exceptional."

Christopher Nolan, who is also a staunch supporter of celluloid over digital, said that "as a past recipient of the FIAF Award, I know how imperative it is that representatives of the film industry around the world come together to ensure that we preserve our film heritage."

He further congratulated the Indian actor saying, "he has played an essential role in putting the cause of film preservation on the map in India and the subcontinent."

Background

The Film Archive Award was introduced in 2001 and its first recipient was Martin Scorsese who was recognised for his film archival efforts.

Since then, the award has honoured personalities from outside the archival scene who have worked to advocate the cause of film preservation.

The past winners of the award include Ingmar Bergman (2003), Mike Leigh (2005), Hou Hsiao-hsien (2006), Peter Bogdanovich (2007), Rithy Panh (2009), Agnes Varda (2013), Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne (2016), Christopher Nolan (2017), Apichatpong Weerasethakul (2018), Jean-Luc Godard (2019), and Walter Salles (2020).

Golden Globe Awards 2021: Check Full List of winners

The 78th Golden Globe Awards ceremony took place in a hybrid format, filmed from Los Angeles and New York City, on February 28, 2021.

The awards were co-hosted by Amy Poehler and Tina Fey for the fourth time. The stars accepted their awards virtually and delivered their acceptance speeches from hotel rooms and living room couches.



The Golden Globe Awards 2021 were the first major televised awards show of 2021. The ceremony had been postponed from its usual early January date.

Netflix had received the most nominations this year (42), with 22 in film categories including Best Picture (Drama) nominations for its films "Mank" and "The Trial of the Chicago 7" and 20 in Television categories, which were dominated by "The Crown" and "Schitt's Creek."

Nomadland won the **Best Motion Picture – Drama** award and the **Best Director** award went to its director **Chloé Zhao**, making her the second woman ever to win the award. The first was Barbra Streisand, in 1984.

Late American actor **Chadwick Boseman** won the Golden Globe award for **Best Actor in a Motion Picture – Drama** for his portrayal of Levee Green in 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom'. The late actor's wife, Taylor Simone Ledward, accepted the award on his behalf.

Following is the Full list of Winners

Film Awards

Award Category	Winner
Best Motion Picture — Drama	Nomadland
Best Director — Motion Picture	Chloé Zhao for Nomadland
Best Performance by an Actor in a Motion Picture — Drama	Chadwick Boseman for “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom”
Best Performance by an Actress in a Motion Picture — Drama	Andra Day for “The United States vs. Billie Holiday”
Best Motion Picture — Musical or Comedy	Borat Subsequent Moviefilm
Best Performance by an Actor in a Motion Picture — Musical or Comedy	Sacha Baron Cohen for “Borat Subsequent Moviefilm”
Best Performance by an Actress in a Motion Picture	Rosamund Pike for “I Care A Lot”
Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role in Any Motion Picture	Jodie Foster for “The Mauritanian”
Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role in Any Motion Picture	Daniel Kaluuya for “Judas and the Black Messiah”
Best Motion Picture — Animated	Soul
Best Motion Picture — Foreign Language	Minari- USA

Best Screenplay — Motion Picture	"The Trial of the Chicago 7"— Aaron Sorkin
Best Original Score — Motion Picture	"Soul" – Trent Reznor, Atticus Ross, and Jon Batiste
Best Original Song — Motion Picture	"Io Si," from "The Life Ahead"

Television Awards

Award Category	Winner
Best Television Series — Drama	The Crown
Best Performance by an Actor in a Television Series — Drama	Josh O'Connor — "The Crown"
Best Performance by an Actress in a Television Series — Drama	Emma Corrin — "The Crown"
Best Television Limited Series or Motion Picture Made for Television	The Queen's Gambit
Best Performance by an Actress in a Limited Series or Motion Picture Made for Television	Anya Taylor-Joy for "The Queen's Gambit"
Best Performance by an Actor in a Limited Series or Motion Picture Made for Television	Mark Ruffalo for "I Know This Much is True"
Best Television Series — Musical	Schitt's Creek

or Comedy	
Best Performance by an Actor in a Television Series — Musical or Comedy	Jason Sudeikis for “Ted Lasso”
Best Performance by an Actress in a Television Series — Musical or Comedy	Catherine O’Hara for “Schitt’s Creek”
Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role in a Series, Limited Series or Motion Picture Made for Television	John Boyega for “Small Axe”
Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role in a Series, Limited Series or Motion Picture Made for Television	Gillian Anderson for “The Crown”

Science and Tech

France conducts first military exercises in space



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Key Highlights:

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- The Space Command of France was announced in 2019 and aims to have 500 personnel by the year 2025.

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Stopping the militarization of space:

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She further added that France plans on developing anti-satellite laser weapons and new surveillance capabilities to close the gaps with rivals Russia, the US, and China.

France, in 2018, had accused Russia of trying to intercept the transmissions from a Franco-Italian satellite that was being used by the armies of France and Italy for secure communications. Louch-Olymp, the Russian satellite, had allegedly approached the Athena-Fidus satellite in what France called 'an act of espionage'.

Indian scientists develop low-cost spectrograph that can locate faint light from distant celestial objects

In a significant development, Indian Scientists have indigenously designed and developed a low-cost optical spectrograph, which is capable of locating sources of faint light from distant celestial objects.

The spectrograph can detect faint light from distant quasars and galaxies, regions around supermassive black-holes and cosmic explosions.

The 'Made in India' optical spectrograph has been named as Aries-Devasthal Faint Object Spectrograph & Camera (ADFOSC).

Key Details

- The 'Made in India' spectrograph has been indigenously designed and developed by Aryabhata Research Institute of observational sciences (ARIES), Nainital.

- The spectrograph has been successfully commissioned on the 3.6-m Devasthal Optical Telescope (DOT), which is the largest in India and Asia.
- It is the largest among the existing astronomical spectrographs across India.

Cost-Effective

- The indigenously-developed spectrograph can locate sources of light with a photon-rate as low as about 1 photon per second.
- Such spectroscopes were so far imported from abroad at high costs but the 'Made in India's spectrograph is almost 2.5 times less costly than the imported ones.

How does a spectrograph work?

- The spectrograph uses a complex arrangement of several lenses made of special glasses, which are polished to better than 5-nanometer smoothness to produce sharp images of the celestial sky.
- The telescope collects photons coming from distant celestial sources, which are then sorted into different colors by the spectrograph and converted into electronic recordable signals using an in-house developed Charge-Coupled Device (CCD) camera that is cooled to an extremely low temperature of -120 degree celsius.
- The total cost of this instrument is almost Rs 4 Crore.

The spectrograph is used by astronomers to study distant quasars and galaxies in a very young universe, regions around supermassive black-holes and cosmic explosions like supernovae and highly energetic Gamma-ray bursts, faint dwarf galaxies and young and massive stars.

ARIES scientist Dr. Amitesh Omar had led the project to develop the spectrograph with a technical and scientific team. The team did the research and developed various optical, mechanical, and electronics subsystems of the spectrograph and camera.

Various national institutes and organisations including the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) were involved in reviewing and developing parts of the instrument.

ARIES now plans to commission more complex instruments such as spectro-polarimeter and high spectral resolution spectrograph on the 3.6-m Devasthal telescope.

ARIES Director Prof. Dipankar Banerjee said that the indigenous efforts to build complex instruments like ADFOSC in India is an important step to become 'Aatmanirbhar' in the field of astronomy & astrophysics."

India Telecom 2021 organised for convergence of technologies, telecom buyers from over 45 countries attend

The Telecom Equipment Export Promotion Council (TEPC) organised 'India Telecom 2021' on March 3-4, 2021 under the Market Access Initiative Scheme (MAI) of the Department of Commerce and with the support of the Department of Telecommunications & Ministry of External Affairs.

India Telecom 2021 is an exclusive International Business Expo that saw participation from over 1,000 delegates, out of which more than 200 were foreign delegates from over 45 countries.

The event was inaugurated by Minister for State for Communication Sanjay Shamrao Dhotre. Over 40 Indian telecom companies showcased their state-of-the-art products and capabilities at the exhibition that was organised a part of the event.

Significance

- The India Telecom 2021 is extremely important for the Indian exporters and has a very high impact on all the Telecom and IT Stakeholders.
- India is a fast-growing telecom market, which is fueled by data growth and this rising local demand pushes the domestic telecom companies to create innovative, high-quality products and solutions that can serve the requirements of both India and emerging markets across the globe.

- Indian companies along with providing state-of-the-art telecom products and services are open to partner and provide skill development training to overseas buyers.
- India Telecom 2021 provided an ideal platform for the convergence of various technologies and business exchange.

While speaking at the event, Minister for State for Communication Sanjay ShamraoDhotre said that the Government has been striving to fulfill PM Narendra Modi's vision of Digital India, which will bridge the digital divide in the country and foster financial inclusion by making critical services available to everyone remotely and provide last-mile connectivity.

He also stated that the Indian manufacturers have already made significant strides in the export of IT and telecom products to several countries and added saying that Indian IT and telecom products are of world-class quality and are globally competitive in both price and technology.

He further stated that the government has announced the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes for various sectors, including telecom sector, to become a part of the global supply chain.

What is Telecom Equipment Export Promotion Council?

- The Telecom Equipment Export Promotion Council was established by Communications Ministry and Commerce & Industry Ministry to promote export of telecom equipment and services.
- The council undertakes several activities to promote exports such as Commissioning of Studies to find potential markets and conducting of national and international seminars and facilitating the participation of exporters in various overseas exhibitions.
- The council also makes various recommendations to the Government regarding necessary changes required in various policies and procedures for the promotion of Exports and Services.

ISRO-NASA develops radar for joint earth observation satellite mission

The Indian Space Research Organisation- ISRO with the US space agency NASA completed the development of a Synthetic Aperture Radar- SAR which is capable of producing extremely high-resolution images for a joint Earth observation satellite mission.

NASA-ISRO SAR (NISAR) is a joint collaboration between both the space agencies for a dual-frequency L and S-band SAR for earth observation. NASA and ISRO had signed a partnership in 2014 to collaborate and launch NISAR.

The Earth Observation Satellite Mission has been targeted to launch in early 2022 from the Sriharikota spaceport of ISRO in Andhra Pradesh.

What is NISAR?

NISAR by both the space agencies will be the first satellite mission to use two different radar frequencies (S-band and L-band) for measuring the changes in Earth's surface less than a centimeter across.

NASA and ISRO develop radar:

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration- NASA has been providing L-band SAR of the mission, GPS receivers, a high-rate communication subsystem for the science data, payload data subsystem, and a solid-state recorder.

While ISRO is providing the S-band SAR, the spacecraft bus, the associated launch services, and the launch vehicle for the mission. Its goal is to make global measurements of the consequences and causes of the land surface changes with the use of advanced radar imaging.

Functions of NISAR:

- NISAR will provide a means of disentangling highly complex processes ranging from ice sheet collapses to ecosystem disturbances as well as natural hazards including tsunamis, earthquakes, landslides, and volcanoes.

- The mission will be measuring the Earth's dynamic surfaces, changing ecosystems, and ice masses. It will provide information about natural hazards, biomass, groundwater, and sea-level rise and will also support a host of other applications.
- NISAR will observe the ice-covered and land surfaces of Earth globally with 12-day regularity, will sample Earth on average every six days for a baseline 3-year mission.
- This will also allow the mission to observe the large range of Earth processes from the ice sheets and flow rates of glaciers to the dynamics of volcanoes and earthquakes.

Use of SAR to produce high-resolution images:

A sophisticated information processing technique known as SAR is used by NISAR in order to produce extremely high-resolution images. The radar will penetrate darkness and clouds which will enable NISAR to collect data day and night in any form of weather.

Over the multiple orbits, the radar images will be allowing users to track changes in hazard sites and croplands, as well as monitor the ongoing crisis. The radar images will also be detailed enough to show local changes and broad enough for measuring regional trends.

Better understanding of land surface changes:

As the mission will continue for years, the data collected will allow a better understanding of the consequences and causes of the land surface changes. It will also increase the ability to manage the resources and also prepare for global change.

NASA will require a minimum of 3 years of operations with the L-band radar and ISRO will require 5 years of operations with the S-band radar over the target areas in India and the Southern Ocean.

Union Minister Thaawarchand Gehlot launches 'Sugamya Bharat App' to enhance accessibility for differently-abled



The Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Thaawarchand Gehlot on March 2, 2021, virtually launched a crowdsourcing mobile application 'Sugamya Bharat App' and a handbook 'Access-The Photo Digest' to enhance accessibility.

The handbook and Sugamya Bharat app have been developed by the

Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities department under the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry.

The Union Minister while launching the Sugamya Bharat App mentioned that a crowdsourcing mobile application is for sensitizing and enhancing accessibility in the 3 pillars of the Accessible India Campaign i.e. ICT ecosystem, transportation sector, and built environment. It will also be able to address the problems regarding Coronavirus faced by the differently-abled.

Objective:

The Sugamya Bharat App will enable people with disabilities as well as the elderly in registering accessibility-related problems in modes of transport, in buildings, or in any infrastructure by uploading the pictures on it.

The users will also be able to receive information on accessibility-related issues through the app.

The app will serve the two-fold purpose of generating awareness and sensitization about the need for accessibility. It will also bring in a major change in accessible features that are provided in the transportation sector, built-up spaces, and other services.

Sugamya Bharat App: Key Details

- It has been provided with several user-friendly features such as videos in Hindi and English, easy-drop down menus, uploading complaints with photographs, and sign language interpretation to demonstrate the process of registration.
- The app is accessible for ease of use for persons with disabilities along with features such as color contrasting options, font size adjustment, having an integrated screen reader in English and Hindi, and text to speech.
- The app is available in 10 regional languages, namely, Marathi, English, Hindi, Kannada, Tamil, Odiya, Gujarati, Telugu, Malayalam, and Punjabi.
- It has a provision of easy photo uploads with a geotagging option of the premise where there is a requirement of accessibility intervention.
- The app also has a provision of providing notification to the users at the time of registration, at the time of resolution, regular status updates, and at the closure of complaints.
- The App will become available for Android users on the play store. The iOS version will be available by March 15, 2021.

Handbook 'Access-The Photo Digest': Key Details

- The handbook is a collection of photographs from across different UTs and states in India.
- It is envisaged as a tool and guide for sensitizing stakeholders about ten basic features of accessibility and good-bad practices in easy-to-understand pictorial form.
- The electronic version of the photo digest will be available on the app as well as on the website of the department.

Enhancing accessibility through Sugamya Bharat App:

The app provides five main features, 4 of which are related to enhancing accessibility while the 5th is a special feature that is only for people with disabilities for the issues related to COVID.

The features related to accessibility include the registration of complaints of inaccessibility across the 3 broad pillars of Sugamya Bharat Abhiyaan, best practices being shared by people as jan bhagidari, and positive feedback of examples; departmental updates; and circulars and guidelines related to accessibility.

The implementation of accessibility-related activities will help towards the vision of universally accessible and inclusive India under the 'Accessible India Campaign'.

Accessible India Campaign: Background

Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan or Accessible India Campaign is a program to serve the differently-abled community of India.

It was launched by PM Modi on December 3, 2015, the International Day of People with Disabilities. The Accessible India Campaign comes with an index of measuring the design of human resource policies and disabled-friendly buildings.

The scheme comes under the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, for the protection of rights and equal opportunities which provides non-discrimination in transport to Persons with Disabilities.

Health Minister Harsh Vardhan inaugurates second edition of Global-Bio India 2021

The Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare & Science and Technology Dr. Harsh Vardhan on March 1, 2021, virtually inaugurated the second edition of Global-Bio India 2021. The theme of the event is 'Transforming Lives' with the tagline 'Biosciences to Bio-economy'.

The three-day event held from March 1 to 3 has been co-organized on a digital platform by the Department of Biotechnology, Science & Technology Ministry along with its public sector undertaking, Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council in the partnership with industry association confederation of Indian industry, Invest India and Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises.

The Biotechnology sector has emerged as a significant part of the country's economy and the government has also been playing a major role in building a USD 150 billion bio-economy by 2025.

The sector has been recognized as one of the major drivers for India for achieving its USD 5 trillion targets.

Objective:

Global-Bio India aims at facilitating the recognition of India as an emerging Innovation Hub and the bio-manufacturing hub globally. The event will facilitate India's investments, Biotech innovation ecosystem, Make in India for Atmanirbhar Bharat, global networking, and collaborations.

Global-Bio India 2021: Key details

- The event has representatives from 50 plus countries with Switzerland as the key partner Karnataka as the state partner.
- The event will have the participation of 5000 plus delegates, 200 plus exhibitors, and 1000 plus start-ups.
- It will witness representation from researchers, academia, start-ups, entrepreneurs, investors, policy leaders, regulators, enablers, medium and large-scale industry, organizations for facilitating the acceleration of the innovation ecosystem in India.
- 24 knowledge sessions in order to emphasize the role of multiple allied sectors in the growth of Biotechnology in India will be held in 3 days. It will include The COVID-19 vaccine journey from Science to delivery; India Fights COVID; Health Conclave; Clean Energy Conclave; Phytopharma and Traditional Knowledge and many more.

Scientific community rose to occasion amid crisis

The Union Health Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan hailed the scientific community for their work when the crisis hit the country. He mentioned that they rose to the occasion once the pandemic hit and conducted research that has not traditionally been their domain.

He added that right from conducting COVID-19 tests to scaling up the laboratories while also working on the vaccines and manufacturing PPE kits, scientists handled the challenges swiftly.

The Minister of Science and Technology while giving the example of National Aerospace Laboratories mentioned that the community responded well to the crisis and that those who use to make aeroplanes started making ventilators in order to meet the challenge.

Dynamic ecosystem of science and technology in India:

While talking about the science and technology ecosystem, the union minister mentioned that India's ecosystem has always been dynamic. It has also become an evolving area with the central government's support through its different policies and schemes.

The Minister further stressed that in 2020, with the background of the pandemic, its resilience, true power, and capability have been unleashed with the concerted efforts of the private sector as well as the government.

An action plan and multi-pronged research strategy were evolved by the scientific community for an immediate response which included the long-term preparedness to tackle COVID-19 infection as well as the augmentation of COVID-19 testing.

First edition of Global-Bio India:

The first edition was a huge success. It saw the participation from over 190 exhibitors, 25 plus countries, 300 plus start-ups, 2500 plus delegates, 60 plus research institutes, 50 plus incubators, representation from 9 states, and 800 plus bio-partnering meetings.

Scientists of National Rice Research Institute develop device for pest management



An Alternate Energy Light Trap- AELT device has been developed by the scientists of ICAR- National Rice Research Institute, Cuttack, for checking pests in agricultural fields. They have also got a patent for the invention.

The automated device has been invented by Dr. Mayabini Jena, former Principal Scientist and Head of Crop

Protection Division, and Dr. Shyamaranjan Das Mohapatra, Principal Scientist (Entomology) of the National Rice Research Institute.

The Alternate Energy Light Trap device invented by the scientists of ICAR institute will help the farmers of India in identifying the insect types that usually lurk in the fields and will also manage them.

How the invention of AELT is significant?

With the invention of the Alternate Energy Light Trap, farmers will be able to save crops worth thousands of crores. They will also be able to save the lives of people from pesticides that are used in farmlands for killing insects and are extremely harmful to the human body.

How the device will control the pest problem?

The AELT device includes a light trap unit in order to attract flying insects. It also has a collector unit with a light trap unit for receiving the lured insects from the light trap.

According to scientists, the device is an eco-friendly and economical insect trapping method and is sufficient enough for handling a large number of insects.

About AELT

- There are two models of the Alternate Energy Trap Device. The bigger one is valued at Rs. 8,800 and can be used easily on the farmland of about one hectare.
- The mini version of AELT costs around Rs. 4,100 and it can be used for the pest problem on the farmland of under one acre.
- The patent of AELT has been shared with a company based in Maharashtra and the commercial production of the product will also start soon.

Sindhu Netra satellite deployed successfully in space, Know all about it!



Sindhu Netra

satellite, developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), was successfully deployed in space on February 28, 2021.

The satellite will boost India's surveillance capabilities to monitor activities of both military warships and merchant shipping in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

The satellite was launched aboard Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) PSLV-C51, which took off on February 28, 2021 from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh.

About Sindhu Netra satellite

- The Sindhu Netra satellite was developed by young DRDO scientists and it is capable of automatically identifying the warships and merchant ships operating in the IOR.
- It will also help in carrying out surveillance in specific areas such as the South China Sea or near the Gulf of Aden and the African coast.

- The satellite has already started communicating with the ground systems.

Significance

Sindhu Netra is one of the first in the series of satellites that will help India in enhancing its surveillance capabilities on land in areas including the Ladakh region and the border areas with Pakistan.

Background

The Indian security agencies feel there is a requirement of 4-6 dedicated satellites that will help them keep a check on the adversary's moves. The centre is also setting up of the Defence Space Agency.

The government has also created a defence space research organisation to look after the ability to protect space assets from being attacked by adversaries there. The space arm of the defence forces would also be bolstered significantly in near future.

ISRO launches Brazil's Amazonia-1 and 18 other satellites

The Indian Space Research Organisation on February 28, 2021, launched Polar Satellites Launch Vehicle- PSLV C51 carrying Amazonia-1 satellite of Brazil and 18 other satellites of USA and India from Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh at 10.24 am.

During the launch, a Brazilian delegation along with ISRO Chief K. Sivan was also present at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre. After four stages of separation, the PSLV rocket launched the Amazonia-1 satellite of Brazil, an optical earth observation satellite.

The first space mission of India for 2021 has been one of the longest for PSLV rocket. This is also the first commercial mission of New Space India Limited, a company of the Indian government under the Department of Space.

The NSIL- New Space India Limited has been undertaking this mission under a commercial arrangement with Spaceflight Inc. USA.

About Amazonia-1 Satellite of Brazil:

It is an optical earth observation satellite of the National Institute for Space Research. The launched satellite will further help in strengthening and reinforcing the existing structure by providing remote sensing data in order to monitor deforestation in the Amazon region. It will also provide an analysis of the diversified agriculture across the territory of Brazil.

Launch of PSLV-C51 rocket:

The PSLV-C51, which is the 53rd mission of Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle launched Brazil's Amazonia-1 satellite as the primary satellite. A total of 18 co-passenger satellites were lifted off from the Space Centre.

The 18 co-passenger satellites launched by PSLV include four from IN-SPACe. Out of 4, 3 are from UNITYsats from the consortium of the three Academic Institutes of India and 1 Satish Dhawan Satellite from Space Kidz India). The other 14 satellites are from New Space India Limited.

It also includes an engraved picture of PM Modi which symbolizes his initiative of Atmanirbharata and space privatization. An e-copy of Bhagavad Gita which is saved on an SD card is also a part of the package.

ISRO Chief congratulates on the launch of satellites:

The Chief of the Indian Space Agency K. Sivan congratulated the Brazilian team on the launch of PSLV-C51 carrying the Amazonia-1 satellite of Brazil along with 18 satellites.

The ISRO Chief stated that India and Brazil feel proud of the successful launch of the satellite. It is Brazil's first satellite which is designed, integrated, and operated by the country's space centre, he further congratulated the Brazilian team for the achievement.

Beginning of stronger relations between India and Brazil:

The Minister for Science, Technology, and Innovation, Brazil, Marcos Ceaser Pontes during his address at the launch event mentioned that the country was

working on this satellite for many years and that it will serve a very important mission for Brazil.

He further added that the launch of a satellite from India's PSLV has marked the beginning of stronger relations between India and Brazil and that there can be no better place than India to further grow the partnership between the two nations.

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Sports

Bhavani Devi becomes first Indian fencer to qualify for Olympics



Bhavani Devi created history on March 14, 2021 by becoming the **first Indian fencer to qualify for the Olympics**.

The 27-year-old reserved her spot in the Tokyo Olympics through the Adjusted Official Ranking (AOR) method.

The much-awaited tournament will go on floors from July 23rd and will conclude

on August 8, 2021.

Union Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju took to Twitter to congratulate the Indian fencer. He stated that she has become the first-ever Indian fencer to achieve the feat.

Key Facts

- Bhavani Devi has become the first-ever fencer from India to qualify for the Olympics in women's individual sabre.
- She has been trained by SAI coach Sagar Lagu in SAI Training Center, Thalassery.

Tokyo Olympics

- The Tokyo Olympics were originally scheduled to be held last year but they were postponed to this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- While Tokyo Olympics will take place from July 23-August 28, 2021, the Paralympics will take place from August 24 to September 5.
- International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach assured earlier this week that the Tokyo Olympics will definitely take place. He

said that the "question is not whether the Olympics will take place, the question is how."

- He further stated that "Tokyo remains the best prepared Olympic city ever and at this moment, we have no reason to doubt that the Opening Ceremony will take place on July 23rd."

Mithali Raj becomes first Indian woman cricketer to score 10,000 international runs across all formats



The veteran batter of the Indian women's cricket team Mithali Raj on March 12, 2021, became the first Indian woman cricketer to complete 10,000 international runs across all cricket formats. She has also become the second woman cricketer internationally to achieve the milestone.

Mithali Raj who leads the ODI team of India has joined Charlotte Edwards of England in the elite club. She achieved success with a boundary off Anne Bosch in the 28th over of India's innings in the ongoing third ODI match against South Africa.

The news was shared by BCCI via Twitter in which it mentioned that Raj is the first Indian woman batter to score 10k international runs.

However, after reaching the milestone Mithali Raj departed in the next ball. She made 36 runs off 50 balls and also hit 5 boundaries in the process.

The Indian cricketer had amassed 663 runs in 10 test matches with the best score of 214, while she has 2364 and 6938 runs from 89 T20 and 20 One Day International respectively.

Achieving the milestone of 10,000:

Mithali Raj, before the game, was 35 short of reaching the 10,000 scores. She scored 663 runs in 10 test matches whereas in 89 T20s she scored 2,364 runs at an average of 37.52. Her majority of runs have come from the 50-over cricket which she

played the most. Mithali has 6,974 runs in the ODIs including the 36 runs scored on March 12.

Match with South Africa:

With the win in the 2nd ODI, India has leveled the five-match series 1-1. Earlier, South Africa had won the toss and had elected to field first against India.

The Captain came to the rescue as she was involved in a 77-run stand with cricketer Punam Raut for the 3rd wicket after the team was in trouble when it was reduced to 64/2.

Other achievements of Mithali Raj:

- Mithali Raj is the highest run-scorer of the women's international cricket and is also the only female cricketer to surpass the 6,000 run mark in ODIs.
- She is also the first player to score 7 consecutive 50s in One Day International Cricket. She has the record for most half-centuries in ODIs.
- She became the Captain of the Women's Indian cricket team in 2005 and is also the only female cricketer to have captained the team in more than one ICC ODI World Cup Final, in 2005 and 2017.
- Mithali Raj, in 2019, became the first woman to complete 20 years in International cricket.
- She is also the recipient of several National and International awards, including the Arjuna Award in 2003 and Padma Shri in 2015.

Bajrang Punia regains World No. 1 spot

Indian wrestler Bajrang Punia has regained his world number one ranking after clinching a second successive gold medal at the Matteo Pallicone Ranking Series.

Punia defeated Tulga Tumur Ochir from Mongolia 2-2 by criteria in the 65kg freestyle event final in Rome on March 7, 2021. He won after getting a two-pointer in the last 30 seconds of the bout.

This was Punia's first international competition since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key Highlights

- Bajrang Punia was ranked at the second spot in the world rankings before the beginning of the Matteo Pallicone Ranking Series.
- His deserving win, however, helped him regain the top spot in the 65 kg weight category with 14 points.
- The 27-year-old made full use of the tournament before the long-awaited Tokyo Olympics 2021.

Background

In 2020, the Indian wrestler had defeated USA's Jordan Oliver in the final to clinch the gold medal at the tournament.

Punia had reserved his place in the Tokyo Olympic Games in September 2019 after clinching bronze at the World Championships.

The Tokyo Olympics, which were postponed due to COVID-19 outbreak will now take place from July 23–August 8, 2021.

South Africa appoints Dean Elgar as Test captain, Temba Bavuma as ODI & T20 captain

South Africa has named Dean Elgar as their new Test captain and Temba Bavuma will lead the side in ODIs and T20Is. Temba Bavuma has become the first black African captain to lead limited-overs sides.

Temba Bavuma has played 44 Tests, six ODIs and eight T20s for South Africa. He has become the first black African to permanently captain a South Africa side after being appointed their limited-overs captain.

The 30-year-old will lead the Proteas in the next two Twenty20 World Cups later this year and in 2022, and the ODI World Cup in 2023.

Speaking about his appointment, Bavuma said that this is one of the greatest honours of his life. He said captaining the Proteas has been a dream of his for many years.

The 33-year-old Dean Elgar will lead the team in the next cycle of the World Test Championship.

Key Highlights

- Both Bavuma and Elgar will replace wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock who had held the T20 and one-day international captaincy roles since January 2020 and was named temporary Test skipper in December.
- Quinton de Kock had taken over all three roles from Faf du Plessis, who retired from Test cricket last month and said he will now focus on T20s.
- Elgar has previously captained the Test side twice when Du Plessis was unavailable.
- Dean Elgar said that to captain your country in any form of the game is the biggest honour that a player can be fortunate to receive.

Background

South Africa is currently ranked sixth in Test cricket and fifth in both ODIs and T20s.

Deepak Kumar wins silver in boxing at Strandja Memorial Tournament in Bulgaria



Deepak Kumar, in boxing, has won a silver medal at the 72nd Strandja Memorial Tournament in Sofia, Bulgaria on February 27, 2021. He lost the final face-off in a split decision against Daniel Asenov of Bulgaria in the men's flyweight.

Deepak Kumar, an Asian Silver winner, was up against Asenov who is a two-time European Championships gold medalist. The Indian boxer had earlier created quite a flutter in the tournament when he stunned Uzbekistan's Shakhobidin Zoirov, reigning Olympic and World Champion, in the semifinals.

During the game on February 27, the Bulgarian boxer was sharp in his counter-attacking game and was consistently on high-guard which resulted in denying Deepak Kumar a clear shot for the most part.

However, Deepak Kumar's second round was better and he had also put up a stronger defensive performance but the judges ultimately ruled in the favor of Bulgaria's Asenov.

In the last 3 minutes, Deepak called the shots for most parts by effortlessly dodging his rival's attacks. He also launched some strong ones of his own. Deepak Kumar, a naib subedar in the Indian Army, is also a former Indian open-gold medallist.

India signs off with two medals:

Naveen Boora (69 kg) had earlier settled for a bronze medal after going down to the gold medallist of Asian Games Bobo-Usmon Baturov of Uzbekistan in the semifinals.

With this, India has signed off with two medals at the Strandja Memorial Tournament this year, which is one less than what the country has managed to win in the previous edition of the event. Among Indian women boxers, no one was able to make the medal rounds and got eliminated by the quarter-final stage.

ISSF Shotgun World Cup: Indian men's skeet team wins bronze medal

The Indian trio of Angad Vir Singh Bajwa, Mairaj Ahmed Khan, and Gurjoat Khangura, after 7 rounds of qualifications, won the bronze medal after defeating the Kazakhstan team by 6-2 in the men's skeet team event at the International Shooting Sport Federation Tournament- ISSF Shotgun World Cup in Cairo, Egypt.

The trio defeated their counterparts Eduard Yechshenko, David Pochivalov, and Alexander Mukhamediyev in the bronze medal match on the 3rd day of the competition of the ISSF. The Indian team was able to reach the bronze medal match once they combined to shoot a score of 491 after 25 shots each on February 26, 2021.

Lost to Russia for finals:

The Indian trio of Angad Vir Singh Bajwa, Mairaj Ahmed Khan, and Gurjoat Khangura could have also made it to the finals but lost to Russia by 5-6. The Russian team won the gold medal by beating the Czech Republic in the finals by 6-0.

Angad Vir Singh Bajwa became the star of the bronze medal match by hitting all 16 targets.

While earlier on the second competition day, Indian shooter Gurjoat nearly missed out on a chance of advancing to the finals of the men's individual skeet competition.

Despite the two solid final qualification rounds of 24 and 25, his score added up to 119 at the end of five rounds and gave him a credible 10th place finish.

Indian women's team in the shotgun world cup:

The Indian women's team consisting of Parinaaz Dhaliwal, Ganemat Sekhon, and Karttiki Singh Shaktawat also made it to the bronze medal match of the Shotgun world cup tournament.

However, the team lost to Olga Panarina, Assem Orynbay, and Rinata Nassyrova of Kazakhstan by 4-6 in a hard-fought match.

About International Shooting Sport Federation:

It is a governing body of the Olympic Shooting events in pistol, rifle, and shotgun disciplines and of various non-Olympic Shooting sport events.

The activities of ISSF include the ISSF World Cup Finals, ISSF World Cup Series, regulation of the sport, Olympic qualifications and organizations of international competitions, ISSF World Championship in all events, and ISSF Separate World Championship in Shotgun events.

Mary Kom appointed as Chairperson of AIBA champions and veterans committee



Indian Boxer Mary Kom has been appointed as the chairperson of the International Boxing Association's (AIBA) champions and veterans committee.

AIBA President Umar Kremlev said in a letter to the 2012 Olympic bronze-medallist, "With great pleasure, I inform you that you have been selected to serve as the

chairperson of the AIBA Champions and Veteran Committee following the mail vote by the board of directors of AIBA."

Kremlev added saying that he is confident that Mary Kom with her vast knowledge and experience will make a valuable contribution to the success of this important committee.

AIBA champions and veterans committee

The AIBA champions and veterans committee was formed in December 2020.

The committee comprises the world's most respected boxing veterans and champions who have achieved significant results and who are ready to share their experience.

The six-time world champion took to Twitter to thank the AIBA President for the new assignment. She promised to give her best and put out her voice for the upliftment of Boxing.

About Mary Kom

Mary is an Indian boxer and current Member of the Indian Parliament. She was nominated as a member of the upper house of the Parliament, Rajya Sabha, by President Ram Nath Kovind on April 25, 2016.

She has created many historic firsts for India in field of Boxing, some of which are listed below:

- She is the only female boxer to become World Boxing Champion for record six times.
- She is also the only boxer to win eight World Championship medals.
- She is only female boxer to win a medal in each of the first seven World Championships.
- She is also the only Indian female boxer to qualify for the 2012 Summer Olympics and win a bronze medal in the flyweight (51 kg) category.
- She is also the first Indian female boxer to win gold at the 2014 Incheon Asian Games .
- She was ranked as the world's No. 1 female light-flyweight boxer by AIBA.
- She is also the first Indian female boxer to win gold at the 2018 Commonwealth Games.
- She is also the only boxer to win Asian Amateur Boxing Championship for a record six times.

Awards

Mary Kom was honoured with India's second-highest civilian award, the **Padma Vibhushan** in 2020.

She was previously awarded the **Padma Shri** (India's fourth-highest civilian award) in 2006 and **Padma Bhushan** (India's third-highest civilian award) in 2013.

Yusuf Pathan announces retirement from all forms of cricket

Indian cricketer Yusuf Pathan has announced his retirement from all forms of cricket. The cricketer issued a statement that read, "I still remember the day I wore the India jersey for the first time. I didn't only wear the jersey that day but took upon by family's, coach's, friends',



of

the

whole country's and my own expectations on my shoulders as well."

His statement further read that since his childhood, his life revolved only around cricket. He continued by saying, "But today is a bit different. There is no World Cup or IPL Final but it is equally important."

He said that the time has come for him to put a full stop to this innings of his life. He officially announced retirement from all forms of the game. He thanked his family, friends, fans, coaches, teams and the whole country for all the support and love.

Recalling some of his best moments, Pathan wrote that winning two World Cups for India and lifting Sachin Tendulkar on his shoulders were some of the best moments of his career.

Yusuf Pathan's journey in cricket

- Yusuf Pathan had made his debut in first-class cricket in 2001/02. He is the older brother of cricketer Irfan Pathan.
- He was a right-handed batsman and a right-arm off-break bowler. His younger brother Irfan Pathan was also an Indian cricketer.
- He had made his international debut under the captaincy of MS Dhoni.
- His ODI debut was in June 2008 against Pakistan and his T20I debut in September 2007 also against Pakistan.
- He played his last ODI and T20I for Team India in March 2012.
- He played his last IPL in the 2018-2019 season as a part of Sunrisers Hyderabad. He was with Kolkata Knight Riders from 2011-2017 and before that with Rajasthan Royals from 2008-2010.

Yusuf Pathan Career Stats					
Format	Match es	Runs Scored/ Top Score	100s/50s	Wickets	Best Bowling
ODI	57	810/123*	2/3	33	3/49

T20I	22	236/37*	0	13	2/22
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President Ram Nath Kovind inaugurates world's largest Narendra Modi stadium in Gujarat



President Ram Nath Kovind on February 24, 2021, inaugurated the world's largest Stadium at Motera, in Gujarat. The Motera stadium has been renamed **Narendra Modi Stadium** and it will surpass Melbourne Cricket Ground to become the largest stadium in the world.

The world's largest cricket stadium will make history by hosting the second home pink-ball test match between India and England on February 24. President Kovind is also expected to watch the match for some time with Union Home Minister Amit Shah after the inauguration ceremony.

The newly built stadium has been equipped with all the modern facilities and technologies necessary for present-day cricket. It also has four dressing rooms which will be necessary for hosting back-to-back twenty-twenty matches.

About Narendra Modi Stadium: Key Details

- The stadium is spread over 63 acres and has a seating capacity of 1.10 lakh people. Melbourne is currently the largest stadium as it can accommodate 90,000 people simultaneously.
- The stadium in Ahmedabad has been built at an estimated cost of Rs. 800 crores and is constructed by Larson & Toubro.
- The world's largest stadium has 76 corporate boxes with a seating capacity of 25 each, an indoor academy, an Olympic level swimming pool, food courts, four dressing rooms for athletes, and a GCA clubhouse.

- A total of 11 clay pitches of five black soil and six red soil have been prepared in the cricket stadium. It will also be the first stadium to use both colored clay for the practice and main pitches. In rain, it can be dried in only 30 minutes.
- The state-of-the-art LED floodlights in the stadium will not warm up the atmosphere and will also provide comfort to the cricketers and spectators.
- A 360-degree podium concourse at a height of 9 meters will not only simplify the movement of the spectators but will also provide a uniform view to them from any stand.
- There is an autographed bat collection of players from the World Cup and IPL matches in the Autograph gallery at the stadium. There is also a 'Hall of Fame', featuring the photographs of well-renowned cricketers.

Foundation stone of the new cricket stadium:

In 2016, when the old Motera Stadium was demolished, it has a capacity of 54,000 spectators.

In January 2018, the foundation stone of the new cricket stadium in Motera was laid by the Gujarat Cricket Association for building the new stadium. The stadium has been completed in a short span of two years and has become another feather in the cap for Gujarat.

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Corporate

Bharat Biotech's Covaxin out of clinical trial mode, granted restricted emergency use authorisation



The central government on March 11, 2021 granted **restricted emergency use authorisation to Bharat Biotech's indigenously developed Covaxin** and said that it is out of the clinical trial mode.

NITI Aayog member (Health) Dr V K Paul confirmed that Covaxin has been granted permission for restricted use in emergency situation in public interest. He

stated that both Covid-19 vaccines - Covishield manufactured by Serum Institute and Bharat Biotech's Covaxin have the same licensure status now.

The condition of Covaxin being required to be administered under clinical trial mode is no longer there. Dr. V K Paul further assured saying that Covaxin has stood the test of time in terms of great safety. He said that only 311 individuals had minimal side effects.

He said that this is the triumph for India's research and development enterprise and science and technology enterprise.

PM Narendra Modi was administered the first dose of Bharat Biotech's Covaxin on March 1, 2021 marking the beginning of the second phase of India's vaccination drive. He will receive the second dose in 28 days.

Background

The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) had granted permission for the restricted use of Covaxin in emergency situations in the public interest on January 3, 2021 in clinical trial mode as an abundant precaution, especially in case of infection by mutant strains.

The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation's (CDSCO) Subject Expert Panel on Covid-19 had recommended granting emergency use authorisation to Covaxin while removing the condition for the vaccine to be administered in **"clinical trial mode"**.

Who will be included in the Phase III COVID-19 vaccination drive?

Dr. V K Paul stated that the government is currently focused on relatively large group of individuals above the age of 60 as well as those aged 45- 60 with comorbidities. He stated that the "centre is building a momentum to cover this significantly large group and then will see its progress and moving forward, a further increase in the circle of those who are eligible will be considered."

Phase 3 clinical trial of COVAXIN shows 81 per cent efficacy: Bharat Biotech

The Indian Council of Medical Research informed on March 3, 2021, that the results of phase 3 clinical trial of COVAXIN, which ICMR has developed in partnership with Bharat Biotech, has shown an interim vaccine efficacy of 81% in preventing COVID-19.

The phase 3 clinical trial was jointly initiated by ICMR and Bharat Biotech International Limited in mid-November 2020. The trial has been conducted on a total of 25,800 individuals across 21 sites.

The interim efficacy trend of 81%, analyzed according to the protocols Drugs Controller General of India, has put the indigenously developed vaccine at par with other global front-runner vaccines.

Reported data available of all the 3 clinical trials of COVAXIN:

The Chairman and Managing Director of Bharat Biotech Krishna Ella said that it is an important milestone in vaccine discovery, for science as well as in our fight against Coronavirus.

He further mentioned that with the results of Phase 3 clinical trials of COVAXIN, the company has now reported data on the indigenous vaccine from Phase 1, 2, and 3 clinical trials which involved around 27,000 participants.

Dr. Balram Bhargava, Director-General, ICMR while talking about the successful results stated that the bench-to-bedside journey of India's first indigenous COVID-19 vaccine in less than 8 months has showcased the immense strength of Atmanirbhar Bharat in fighting the odds and stand tall in the global public health community. He added that it is also a testament to the country's emergence as a global vaccine superpower.

COVAXIN: India's first indigenously developed vaccine

COVAXIN is the first Coronavirus vaccine that has been developed completely by India. After the successful isolation of the SARS-CoV-2 virus at the National Institute of Virology- NIV, in March 2020, the ICMR had entered into a public-private partnership with Bharat Biotech in order to develop the virus isolate into an effective vaccine candidate.

The vaccine developed by Bharat Biotech was characterized by ICMR- NIV through in-vitro experiments and electron microscopy studies.

According to the research body, the pre-clinical trials of the vaccine in hamsters and small animals had shown promising results in terms of immunogenicity and safety.

Studies assured safety and efficacy of COVAXIN:

Further studies conducted in rhesus macaques had established the protective efficacy and remarkable safety of the vaccine.

The phase 1 and 2 clinical trials that were conducted in 755 participants had demonstrated a high safety profile of COVAXIN with seroconversion rates of 98.3% and 81.1% on days 56 and 104.

INCR informed that India's vaccine has been developed on the WHO prequalified Vero cell platform which has also been globally recognized with a well-established track record of safety.

It further added that COVAXIN's ability to neutralize the UK variant strain of SARS-CoV-2 has also been established.

Indians must continue to receive the vaccine:

The development and the deployment of Coronavirus vaccine COVAXIN has ensured that India has a powerful weapon with it in a continually evolving pandemic situation and will go a long way to help in winning the war against the crisis.

The need of the hour is to ensure that the citizens of India must continue to receive the Coronavirus vaccine and help in breaking the chain of virus transmission.

WHO grants emergency use authorization to Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine



Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine

The World Health Organization (WHO) on March 12, 2021 issued **emergency use authorization for Johnson & Johnson's coronavirus vaccine**.

This paves the way for the **one-shot vaccine dose** to be used as part of the United Nation's international vaccine

distribution effort.

WHO's approval for the vaccine comes a day after the European Union gave its approval to the vaccine. This means that countries that receive shots through the UN's COVAX effort could cite the new endorsement in the distribution of the shot.

WHO Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a statement that every new, safe and effective tool against COVID-19 is another step closer to controlling the pandemic. *'But the hope offered by these tools will not materialize unless they are made available to all people in all countries,'* he added.

The WHO Director-General further urged governments and companies to live up to their commitments and use all solutions at their disposal to ramp up production of the vaccines to make them globally available and affordable for all.

Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine

- Johnson & Johnson's coronavirus vaccine is the **first single-dose vaccine** to be listed by WHO.
- The efficiency data from the large clinical trials conducted by the company show the vaccine to be particularly effective in older populations.
- WHO and a team of assessors from all regions had adopted an 'abbreviated assessment' based on outcomes of the EMA review and evaluation of quality, safety and efficacy data focused on low- and the middle-income country needs to expedite listing of the vaccine.
- The WHO assessment considered suitability requirements as well such as cold chain storage and risk management plans to be implemented in countries.

What is the storage criteria for the vaccine?

The vaccine needs to be stored at **-20 degrees**. This may prove challenging in some environments. However, the vaccine has a long shelf life of two years and it can be kept for three months at 2-8°C.

Is Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine effective?

According to studies, Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine is **66 percent effective** in protecting any cases of moderate to severe illness and **85 percent effective** against severe cases of COVID-19.

The vaccine completely prevented hospitalizations and death four weeks after vaccination.

Background

The World Health Organization had earlier listed the Pfizer/BioNTech, AstraZeneca-SK Bio and Serum Institute of India vaccines for emergency use.

No evidence of increased risk of blood clots from vaccine: AstraZeneca



AstraZeneca defended its COVID-19 vaccine on March 12, 2021 saying that there was *"no evidence of an increased risk"* of blood clots.

The European and UK medicines regulators also defended AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine saying that the link between the vaccine and blood clots has not been confirmed and that rollouts should

continue.

This comes after a group of European countries- **Denmark, Norway and Iceland** temporarily suspended the use of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine on March 11, 2021. **Bulgaria became the latest** to follow suit on March 12 with Prime Minister Boyko Borissov ordering a temporary halt to vaccination using AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine until the European Medicines Agency "rejects all doubts" about the vaccine's safety.

One Asian country-**Thailand** also suspended the use of the vaccine. Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha canceled plans to publicly get the AstraZeneca vaccine shot on March 12.

No evidence of increased risk of pulmonary embolism: AstraZeneca

The European nations had temporarily suspended the use of AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine due to concerns about patients developing blood clots post-vaccination. The move came after a 49-year-old nurse died of *"severe blood coagulation problems"* days after receiving the vaccine in Austria, following which the nation suspended the use of a batch of AstraZeneca vaccines on March 8th.

The **European Medicines Agency (EMA)** however, insisted that **AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine is safe**. It also said that the preliminary probe showed that the batch of AstraZeneca vaccines used in Austria was likely not to blame for the nurse's death.

The agency urged countries to keep rolling out the vaccine while investigations take place. It added saying that the vaccine's benefits continue to outweigh its risks and it can be administered while the investigation of cases of thromboembolic events is ongoing.

UK's medicine regulator, **Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA)**, also issued a statement on March 11, 2021 reassuring the public that the **vaccine is still safe** and that *"people should still go and get their COVID-19 vaccine."*

AstraZeneca also defended its vaccine saying that the analysis of their safety data of more than 10 million records **showed no evidence of an increased risk of pulmonary embolism** (blockage caused in pulmonary arteries by blood clots) or deep vein thrombosis in any defined age group, gender, batch or in any particular country with COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca.

The company added saying that, *"In fact, the observed number of these types of events are significantly lower in those vaccinated than would be expected among the general population."*

As per reports, real-world data also shows that the vaccine is having a significant impact in reducing Covid-19 hospitalizations. A single dose of the vaccine reportedly reduces the risk of hospitalization from Covid-19 by more than 80% in people aged over 80.

Background

Denmark was the first country to temporarily suspend the use of AstraZeneca's vaccine. The Danish health authority though stressed that the move was precautionary.

On other hand, several other nations including **France, Germany, the Netherlands, Mexico, Nigeria** and the **United Kingdom** continued their rollout of the vaccine, reassuring their citizens of its safety.

The concerns over the AstraZeneca vaccine come at a time when there are already disputes over its slow supply to the European Union.

US to support Indian manufacturer Biological E's efforts to produce 1 billion COVID-19 vaccines



The United States International Development Finance Corporation- DFC announced that it will be supporting Biological E's efforts of producing 1 billion doses of Coronavirus vaccines by the end of the year 2022.

The vaccines of COVID-19 by the Indian manufacturer will be produced with stringent regulatory authorization- SRA and /or WHO Emergency Use listing including Johnson & Johnson Vaccines.

The announcement by the corporation is part of its Global Health and Prosperity Initiative. Under it, the agency has been working to increase the manufacturing, production, and distribution capacity for various vaccines, including Coronavirus vaccines.

The announcement was highlighted by the Biden-Harris administration during the Quad summit, during which the leaders from Australia, the US, Japan, and India announced a landmark partnership for further accelerating the end of the pandemic. The first Quad summit was held on March 12, 2021, in a virtual format.

DFC extends support to increase the capacity of producing COVID-19 vaccines:

According to a DFC release, Biological E is a woman-run and woman-operated business, advancing the agency's 2X women's initiative for promoting global gender equity.

The corporation will work with the Indian manufacturer to finance the increased capacity of producing at least 1 billion doses of Coronavirus vaccines.

The vaccines that will be produced with the corporation financing will complement the existing efforts of vaccinating as many people globally as possible in the shortest span of time.

Increasing vaccination rates to protect communities:

The Chief Operating Officer of DFC, David Marchick highlighted that expanding the vaccine manufacturing, especially the Coronavirus vaccines and boosters will help in increasing the vaccination rates and in protecting communities around the world.

He further added that it is hard to invest with a greater developmental impact than using the financial tools in order to increase the vaccine manufacturing capacity to help the developing countries in Asia and the world respond to Coronavirus and other diseases.

DFC strengthening global health systems:

Under the development strategy Roadmap for Impact, the Development Finance Corporation has been strengthening the global health systems by working to provide businesses with financing in order to increase the capacity in manufacturing, production, and the distribution of vaccines.

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सामाजिक सुनिश्चित, इस ई-पुस्तक का कोई भी खण्ड या संपूर्ण ई-पुस्तक को किसी भी रूप में (इलेक्ट्रॉनिक, मैकेनिकल, फोटोकॉपी, रिकॉर्डिंग या किसी भी अन्य माध्यम से) प्रतिलिपिकरण, पुनः प्रकाशन, पुनः प्रसारण, पुनः प्रसारण और किसी भी घटना, परिस्थिति और प्रणाली में उपयोग तब तक नहीं किया जा सकता, जब तक कि कॉपीराइट प्राप्तकर्ता से लिखित अनुमति न प्राप्त हो. यदि उपरोक्त में से कोई भी या संबंधित गतिविधि का कोई भी प्रमाण मिलता है या सुनिश्चित किया जाता है तो कड़ी दण्डात्मक वैधानिक कार्रवाई की जाएगी.

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